

Breezy Stories

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Breezy Stories

September

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BREEZY STORIES

for October stars

DAUGHTERS OF DANGER

Betty Wallace's gay novelette of Broadway's lovely lilies—
They toil not—but they spin plenty!

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But we are not discussing so universal a topic as the
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September

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C. H. YOUNG PUBLISHING CO., Inc.,

NEW YORK

A LADY'S MADE

By Jay Hilton

JUST before midnight Sandra Morton rushed up three long flights of stairs and entered the one-room apartment she shared with Kit Harvey. As she slammed the door behind her, Kit looked up from the bed where, clad in a brief pyjama jacket, she was busily engaged in applying henna tint to the tips of her toes.

"Home early, aren't you?"

"Not by six hours," Sandra informed her. She flung her coat toward a chair and going over to the mirror, angrily surveyed the broken shoulder-strap of her one evening gown.

"Have an accident?" Kit asked.

"Yes!" Sandra flared. "When I accepted that invitation tonight it was an accident! I should have known better."

"Well?"

Sandra shrugged her shoulders. "He was one of these birds that go in for research in taxicabs. A regular handy man."

"Oh," said Kit, in a disappointed tone. "Is that all?"

"Isn't that enough?" Sandra demanded. "I hate men! The kind of men we get to know, I mean! They seem to think a theatre ticket and two cocktails in a speakeasy is a marriage certificate, and the back seat of a cab the wedding-bed. Ugh!"

She slid out of her dress and stood, holding it in her hand. Tomorrow she would have to mend it. And what good would that do her? None, she

reflected bitterly, not any at all. Things had been bad enough before she met Tod Walker. Then, for three months life had been perfect, or nearly perfect, until suddenly Tod had gone. Four months ago he had gone,—and since then there had been nothing but work and sleep, with an occasional ugly interlude like that of tonight.

She hung the damaged frock carelessly in a closet and walked across the room, standing in front of the window, breathing deeply the night air. Behind her, Kit said:

"For Pete's sake!"

"Well?"

"I mean, since when have three inches of silk panties been a public costume? If you're going to stand there, pull down the shade or put something on."

Sandra turned on her quickly. "You mean, I suppose, that some one might see me. Some *man*! Well, I hope one does! I hope a dozen do, and that it keeps them awake all night, and all tomorrow night, too!"

Kit blinked her eyes lazily. "And what a swell mood you seem to be in." Slowly she surveyed the smoothly silken contours of her roommate's body, the honey-colored hair, and the eyes that were sometimes gray and sometimes green beneath their deep lashes, the lips that didn't need to be reshaped with lipstick to be perfect. She sighed. "With what you've got, Sandy, it's no wonder that men go after you."

"What if they do?" Sandra demanded. "What do I get out of it? Tell me that."

"Broken shoulder-straps." Kit transferred her attention to her other foot, brushing the nails vigorously into deep polish. "Me, I have to work for the ones I grab." She held up a foot for inspection. "Good effect, isn't it? My own idea."

"What is the idea, anyway?" Sandra inquired, smiling in spite of herself.

"Well, it's this way. You see, you're always reading about not being ashamed of the way your hands appear in public, and all that kind of hooley, and I think it's a pretty good thought, even so. But I went a step further. I mean, if all a boy friend is going to see is my hands fluttering over a dinner table, that's one thing, but the way things are now, what with the depression and all, and not knowing where you're going to have breakfast when you start out to dinner, well——"

Sandra laughed. "You're hopeless!"

"It's not hopelessness. It's preparedness."

"For what?"

"How should I know?" Kit waved one hand vaguely. "I don't believe in Santa Claus, but birth control. Look before you lip is my motto."

"It will be your epitaph if you aren't careful," Sandra warned her with a smile.

"Uh-huh," Kitty agreed languidly. "Maybe. But what'll I care then? Turn out the light, will you, honey?"

Sandra turned out the light and got into bed, and lay there for a long time thinking. She thought of her home, in the northern part of the state, which was no longer a home since her mother had died and her father married again. She thought of the year that had elapsed since she first arrived in New York, with a light purse

and lighter heart, and a thousand and one day-dreams. Then, all the dreams had merged into one, when she met Tod Walker.

Tod did something or other in the brokerage concern of which his uncle was the silent partner. Just what that something was, Tod was vague about, but it was sufficient to enable him to maintain a comfortable apartment, a foreign roadster, and a creditable number of charge accounts.

In the first few weeks of their companionship, Sandra forgot completely the drab realities of the previous months. Tod was an agreeable and charming lover; if she had allowed him to do so he would have bought for her everything his errant fancy suggested. As it was, she managed to confine him to flowers and occasional books. Kit called her an awful fool.

Sandra smiled. In Tully, where she had been born, girls didn't take lace and silk lingerie from boys.

"Nor the other way around, I suppose!" Kit had observed somewhat tartly.

Whether she had taken them or not made no difference now, Sandra told herself, turning restlessly in her bed. Tod was gone. . . She had lost him, or rather, he had been taken from her. Call it what you would the answer was the same. He was gone.

In his last interview with her he had explained, diffidently, hesitantly. His uncle insisted that he marry a girl in his own set. And he was dependent upon his uncle for everything he had; what he actually earned by his own efforts, he admitted with a forced laugh, wouldn't pay his boot-legger's bill.

So he left, and all Sandra had to remember him by were a dozen or more books, and the tarnished tinsel ribbons of corsages long since wilted.

These and her memories!

II

KIT was dressing for a party. So far, she was attired in silk lace stockings of an exotic openwork design, and slippers consisting principally of alarmingly high heels and paper-thin soles. Without interrupting the process of changing the color of the shadows under her eyes from their natural gray to a more alluring purple, she said:

"Why don't you change your mind and come along, San?"

Sandra looked up from the stocking she was repairing: "I told you, Kit, I'm washed up with that kind of party."

"Don't be a dodo all your life," Kit implored her. "What's it getting you sitting home?"

"We've gone into all that."

"Mooning," Kit went on as though she hadn't heard her. "That's all you're doing. Mooning! Why don't you sing, 'Lover Come Back To Me' or something? Keep a love light burning in the window, and all that. . . . Forget him!"

Sandra winced slightly. She knew who Kit meant. Kit meant Tod. And she wished Kit wouldn't. She said: "Please——"

"Oh, I know. Why don't I dry up, and leave you to your sorrows in peace? Only I want you to snap out of it, and have a good time. Come on out tonight."

"It's not my idea of a good time," Sandra reminded her. "You know that."

Kit shrugged her shoulders, and slipped into a very brief scantie. "You beat me, kid. I mean, I think virtue is swell in its place, and all that, but I can't see that it does any of us any good around here. Virginity is all right, but what the hell are you going to do with it in this neck of the woods? You can't adver-

tise it, or wear it with a couple of bangles on your wrist."

Suddenly the doorbell rang sharply three times.

"Now what?" Kit demanded. "It can't be my crowd, it's too early."

"I'll answer," Sandra said. She went over and pressed the button that released the latch on the outside door, and then went out into the hallway. A postman climbing the stairs looked up and said, "Miss Morton?"

"Yes."

"Registered special." He held out a letter.

Sandra signed for it and went back into the room. Her heart fluttered wildly for a moment. Maybe it was from Tod. She tore it open quickly and scanned the contents of the single sheet.

"What's the matter?" Kit demanded, after Sandra had read the letter through twice without speaking. "Not bad news?"

Sandra laughed nervously. "Hardly! Just surprising! Here, read it."

She handed Kit the letter, and lighted a cigarette with fingers that trembled ever so little. It was all too amazing!

"God!" Kit exclaimed, looking up. "Two thousand berries! Who was she?"

"An aunt,—or, at least, a sort of aunt. She lived somewhere up in Vermont. I hardly remember her."

"Well, she remembered you all right!" Kit began, and then the bell rang once more. "That's probably my gang," she added. "Tell 'em they can wait. What the hell, I gotta roommate with money now!"

When at last she was gone, Sandra took up the letter and reread it. Concise, and to the point, it informed her that according to the will of the late Mrs. Martha Judson, she had been left the sum of two thousand dollars. There followed the address

of a firm of attorneys on lower Broadway with whom she was advised to get in touch.

Two thousand dollars! It wouldn't last forever, of course, but right now it seemed a fortune. Money for clothes, and silk stockings, and shoes! Money for delicate lace underthings; singlettes of fragile silk, brassières that were nothing more than a suggestion formed of delicate lace, *négligés* that were a froth of tinted chiffon. Scents, and lotions, and powders. Money for vacations.

She'd be sensible, of course! Just one little splurge, and then the rest would be put away for a nest-egg.

Lighting a fresh cigarette, she curled up on the bed, her book forgotten, her mind torn between dreams of the things she would buy, and the economy she really should practice.

The next few weeks passed swiftly. Everything was changed now. The weary routine of her office work was no less monotonous, but Sandra no longer feared the sharp looks and sharper comments of Miss Bevins, her immediate superior. If she were fired she could take her time looking for another place. But she didn't want to be fired. Sandra didn't know what she really did want, she only knew that a vague feeling of unrest possessed her.

Loitering on her way home from work she lingered before the windows of tourist agencies, scanning the tempting posters displayed of places she wanted to go to. The gay and glamorous spots she wanted to visit: Palm Beach and Miami; California! Romantic cruises through the West Indies, or the Mediterranean, or to the Riviera. At such times two thousand dollars seemed very little.

And then, one night, Tod telephoned. His voice came breathlessly over the wire:

"Sandra?"

"Yes."

"This is Tod." As though, Sandra thought, she hadn't known; as though she could forget the sound of his voice.

She waited.

"I've got to see you, Sandra. May I see you tonight? In half an hour? We'll go somewhere for dinner."

"Why, of course, Tod. But make it an hour, won't you?" When she hung up the receiver her heart was fluttering foolishly. She put her fingers to her face and found her cheeks hot and flushed.

Quickly she stripped off her clothes and dashed under the shower. The silvery crystal needles of water broke with chill sharpness against the burning flesh of her body. Tod was back! Stepping out of the tub she looked at her reflection in the mirrored door of the bathroom, and remembered with another swift flush what Kit had said about her figure. She had never thought about herself that way before, but now— Her eyes took in the ivory curve of her slender throat, swept downward over the creamy modeling of her shoulders and the firm, carnelian-tipped half-moons of her breasts; swept on downward along the subtle lines where hips met thighs and curved past rounded knees down to the ultimate perfection of high, arched insteps ending in the toes on which she now stood posed, and again she flushed. Perhaps—to-night—

Hurriedly she went on about her dressing. She was glad now that Kit had insisted on her buying the new evening gown. It had seemed foolish at the time, when all that she had intended getting was a fall suit, but Kit had gone with her, and between Kit and the gown she had been lost.

It was a gorgeous creation! From the waist shimmering lace of sea-green cascaded downward, growing

deeper and deeper in tone until at her ankles it seemed the color of the very sea depths themselves. Above her waist the green lace, what little there was of it, suddenly became silver; silver that moulded itself upward briefly to the exact point where it could give up the task of maintaining a semblance of modesty to two narrow bands of brilliants.

Pirouetting before the mirror, Sandra regarded the effect first with admiration, than with a trace of doubt. It was charming, of course, but if it only had a back, or the merest pretense of a back! Maybe Tod wouldn't approve of it. Maybe Tod—

Before she had time to continue the bell pealed sharply. It was Tod. Grabbing up her evening wrap Sandra went down to him.

Tod turned his car into the thinning traffic of Fifth Avenue and smiled down at Sandra.

"I thought we'd go to some quiet place for dinner," he told her, "and then I want to talk to you. Later we can go somewhere and dance, if you like."

"I'd like," Sandra said. "Where to now? Voisin's? The Crillon?"

He shook his head. "New place I discovered in the Sixties. Small, and you get decent cocktails."

When they had been ushered into a booth, and Tod had helped her out of her wrap and was sitting across from her, he looked at her in sudden admiration, and at her dress—what there was of it above the table-top.

"Like it?" Sandra asked, taking her cue from the light in his eyes.

He nodded. "New, isn't it?"

"A present," she agreed.

"A present?" Tod repeated, with a faintly puzzled frown.

Sandra laughed lightly. "To myself—from myself!"

Tod laughed too, not quite so lightly.

"You must have had a raise!"

"No," Sandra explained. "An aunt died and left me some money. That is, she wasn't exactly my aunt, but only sort of one. I didn't know her very well."

"I see," Tod said, looking as though he didn't see at all. Then he shrugged his shoulders slightly, and raised his Daiquiri cocktail. "To us."

"To us!" Sandra said.

Throughout the dinner she felt Tod's eyes constantly upon her. He ate but little, drinking innumerable cocktails instead, watching her speculatively. Once, between courses, when Sandra was leaning forward across the table, immersed in the relation of some anecdote about her roommate, she caught his gaze fastened on the hollow where the lace of her evening dress fell away from her breasts. She blushed, straightened up quickly, breaking off the thread of her narrative.

Avoiding her eyes Tod ordered another drink.

As they were finishing their coffee, he faced her suddenly:

"I've got to talk to you, Sandra, and I can't do it here. It's something important—important to us both. Will you come up to my apartment for a while?"

Something warned her to refuse, but she tried to shake the feeling off. She had lost Tod once; now he had returned, and she mustn't lose him again. And, after all, didn't she love him; hadn't he told her repeatedly that he loved her? She was safe—nothing would happen. . . .

III

SANDRA sank back among the soft cushions at one end of the modernistic lounge and followed Tod with her eyes as he went about the

business of mixing fresh highballs, talking disjointedly all the while. Finally he came over and sank down beside her.

"Do you realize," he asked suddenly, with an attempt at lightness, "that you haven't kissed me this evening?"

"You haven't asked me to," Sandra reminded him. "Besides, all that was over—months ago."

"It can never be over!" He reached out and took one of her hands in his, drawing her slowly closer. "Do you think I have been able to forget you for a minute? Your kisses? You!"

With a swift movement his arms went around her, and she found his lips crushed for a searing eternity down on hers.

"I love you, Sandra! You must know how I love you!"

Her head bent back in the cradled prison of his arms, she looked up at him through wide eyes and whispered:

"I always thought you did."

Then his lips were against her lips again, pressing fiercely until it seemed as though her last breath was being drawn out of her.

Then, suddenly, her mouth was free, and she felt his lips questing with burning intensity towards the hollow of her throat, and over her shoulders. She felt herself sinking—sinking! In indolent undulations waves of surrender rippled over her. . . .

With an effort she pulled herself back towards reality.

"Please, Tod!" she murmured faintly. "Don't!"

Reluctantly he raised his head. His hair hung damply over eyes that glittered with an avid light.

"I can't stand it without you! I want you—I've got to have you, Sandra!"

With trembling fingers she brushed back his hair:

"Not now, Tod—not this way! Your uncle——"

"Damn my uncle!" His lips sought hers; burning fingertips pressed into the soft flesh beneath her breasts. She struggled to free herself, holding him out at arm's length, looking into his eyes.

"You mean," she demanded, "that you'll marry me in spite of your uncle?"

For a minute he was silent. His glance faltered, and then dropped. He was silent for so long that Sandra, too, looked down, and discovered that one fragile strap of her evening dress had snapped, so that the lace of her scanty bodice had fallen. Nervously she shielded herself with a hand, and prompted:

"Well?"

Tod's moist red lips twisted into the outlines of a smile:

"I mean—well, uncle's leaving for Europe next week, to be gone for six months. Don't you understand, dear? Six months that we'll have for ourselves."

Her gray-green eyes growing wider, Sandra said slowly:

"You mean, six months to be married in?"

"Married!" Tod snorted impatiently. "You know we can't get married! I explained all that to you months ago. But we needn't get married. You can stop work and move in here——"

"And when your uncle returns," Sandra cut in quietly, "what then?"

Tod shrugged his shoulders. "There's plenty of time to worry about that. Anyway, the old buzzard is pretty broadminded. He as much as told me he didn't mind my having a mistress, as long as I stayed single." Once again his eyes swept hungrily over her; and when she said nothing, he continued hopefully: "You mean—you will, Sandra?"

"I mean," Sandra said distinctly, "just this." The back of her fingers cracked sharply against the corner of his mouth as she jumped to her feet. "You're contemptible! . . . And to think that I once wasted time loving you! Get me my coat, please."

Tod sprang erect and sneered down at her:

"The little Miss Innocence stuff, eh? But I'm not taking any! I suppose that's how you got that dress, and the rest of your new clothes."

Startled, Sandra moved back a step.

"Tod!"

"Tod!" he mimicked. "An aunt died and left me some money! That is, not exactly an aunt, but sort of one. And I know exactly the sort! An uncle would be nearer it!"

They stood there, face to face, Tod angry and defiant, Sandra white and scornful, one hand still clutched protectingly to the bosom of her frock.

"I wasn't born yesterday," he informed her. "You fooled me before, but you can't do it again!"

His voice was growing thick, and he swayed uncertainly on his feet. Sandra realized for the first time just how drunk he was, and how precarious her position. Frantically, her eyes sought the door that led to safety, and she started towards it, only to have him seize her, pinioning her arms fast by her sides. As she still tried to shield herself, clutching at her fallen bodice, he laughed drunkenly.

"You needn't try to be so damned modest! I've seen women before—and I'll see more of you, too, before we've finished."

With the last remnants of her strength she fought against the grasp that held her close. She felt hot kisses pouring over her mouth, over her body. She made one final, desperate effort and then went limp.

One moment Tod Walker was hold-

ing a raging wildcat in his arms, and the next moment a girl who hung there passively. The sudden transition frightened him into semi-sobriety.

Gently he lowered her on to the cushions and said:

"Sandra. Sandra!"

She opened her eyes.

"Sandra," he repeated hoarsely. "Are you all right?"

"I suppose so." She gave a short, bitter laugh. "You've won. I'm not strong enough to fight you."

Shorn of their protective covering, her breast rose and fell in rhythm to her labored breathing, but now she scorned any attempt at concealment. As he stood there looking dazedly down at her, she eyed him steadily, and said with icy deliberateness:

"Don't let me stop you, please! You've won, I tell you. But when you have finished amusing yourself I should like to go home. I am afraid the evening has tired me."

With a muttered curse Tod dropped on to the lounge and buried his head in his hands.

"God!" he exclaimed. "But I'm a beast!"

Sandra's cool glance flicked over his bowed head.

"You are," she admitted at last. Then, when he made no further move, she rose slowly to her feet: "If you've quite finished I am going home."

Tod staggered into an upright position.

"Don't bother," she told him, "I'd much prefer to go alone."

She crossed the room, picked up her evening wrap, and went out.

When she let herself into their apartment Kit was preparing for bed. She looked up quickly and said:

"Been stepping out, Sandy?" Then seeing the look on her roommate's face, she sobered suddenly. "What's wrong, kid?"

Sandra laughed mirthlessly, and slipped out of her wrap, standing before her.

"My God!" Kit exclaimed. "Another broken shoulder-strap. Who was it this time?"

"Tod," Sandra said briefly.

"Tod?" Kit looked at her amazed. "Not— Not *your* Tod?"

Sandra nodded.

Kit sank back on the bed. "Well, my God, what do you know about that! Ain't men all the same, though! The only difference between one pair of pants and another is the waist measure."

Sandra's lips curved into a cynical smile.

"They're all the same," she admitted. Her chin went up suddenly and her eyes hardened. "And from now on they're all going to be the same to me."

Kit sat up with a look of amazement:

"You mean——"

"I mean," Sandra cut in, "I'm tired of traveling the shady side of Everyman's Street. I'm crossing over." She stepped out of her frock, and, standing in wispy panties, pointed a cigarette at the astounded Kit.

"I'm changing—now! I'm leaving for Paris the first of the week—on the same boat on which Tod's uncle sails. I've got enough money for a round-trip ticket, some clothes, and a couple of hundred left. And when I come back I'll either be ready for the gutter, or I'll be holding a tinsel hoop for men to jump through." She took a puff on her cigarette, put one hand on her hip, and turned to the mirror and back again before she added: "And you can bet your bottom dollar that I'll be holding the hoop! Jump, little gentlemen, jump!"

"Gawd!" said Kit, in an awed voice, and, as an afterthought, added: "Let me have the ones that stumble."

IV

NEAL GORDON glanced at his wrist-watch. It was nearing the hour for morning cocktails, and the deck chair to the right of him was still vacant; considering the fact that the sea was as calm as the proverbial mill-pond, it seemed inexcusable.

Gordon was being amused, and he disliked having his amusements interrupted, postponed. He smiled fleetingly when he thought of the ironical twist of events that had introduced him to Sandra Morton, that is if a shipboard acquaintance could be called an introduction.

He took off his cap and ran a hand over his graying hair. She was a trim little piece, no doubt about that. And remarkably calm and self-assured on what she openly admitted to be her first trip across. Most women either concealed the fact, or gushed. She did neither, yet those gray-green eyes of hers in which a hundred varying emotions seemed to slumber, missed nothing.

He smiled with inward amusement when he thought of the confidences he had already drawn from her. She had told him about the boy who had disappointed her, the two-thousand-dollar legacy, the boy's adamant uncle.

That amused him most of all. He wondered what she would say if she knew that Tod Walker was his nephew!

He looked up to see her swinging down the deck toward him. She was wearing a smart knitted sports ensemble of soft browns that flowed about her as she moved; every long, lithe line of her whispered seduction. Not whispered, Neal Gordon amended; "cried out" was what he meant.

Rising to his feet he said:

"I had nearly given you up."

Sandra smiled up at him. "I've been playing tennis on the upper deck, with a delightful Englishman," she added maliciously, as he tucked a rug about her.

"With Denis Montgomery, that is," he interposed.

"You sound as though you didn't approve of him."

"I don't approve of any man who takes you away from me," Gordon told her, settling back in his chair. "You can't blame me for that."

Sandra laughed. "You should have been playing yourself, then."

"I prefer," Gordon said slowly, holding her glance momentarily, "to lose my love sets elsewhere." He stopped a passing steward. "Shall we have our *apéritifs* out here? It's much less crowded than the bar now."

"You know," he continued later, "I am thinking——"

"Yes?"

"That this boy—Tod, was his name?—had quite excellent taste," he paused, looked thoughtfully at her, and finished, "but lamentable technique!"

Sandra took a sip of her vermouth *mélange*:

"If you are going to say things like that, I shall regret having confided in you."

"I hope," he said, "that you will never have any regrets on my account." Then, before she could answer, he went on: "Tell me, after this little vacation of yours, do you think you will be content to return to the grind of office work?"

Sandra shrugged her shoulders. "I'll have to be. I mean, there isn't anything else for me to do."

It was the cue Gordon had been waiting for.

"Are you sure?"

She looked at him in surprise.

"Sure," he elaborated, "that the

future offers you only hard work?"

Her eyes held nothing but a look of blank innocence as she said:

"Why, how else could I possibly live? Unless I married, of course."

Gordon coughed, and flung away his cigarette.

"Of course," he agreed hastily, and drained his cocktail.

A tall man in rumpled tweeds and crinkly brown hair stopped before them.

"How about six laps before luncheon, Miss Morton? And you, too, Gordon."

"I'd love it, Denis." Montgomery helped her up, and she looked down at Gordon. "Won't you come, Mr. Gordon?"

Neal Gordon shook his head. "I'll keep count for you," he advised them. "Run along." Watching them swing away, he frowned, and lit a fresh cigarette. It was damned annoying not to be able to make up your mind, one way or the other. One moment he decided that Sandra Morton was everything her naïve innocence proclaimed her to be, and the very next moment he decided that no girl could possibly be possessed of her allure and remain inviolate.

As for Tod—how far had he been able to go with her? Not so far, according to her story, but that was because Tod was nothing but a callow fool to begin with. The damned idiot hadn't even been able to describe her to him, when he had attempted it five months before. Gordon had then imagined that this Sandra Morton was simply another of the tens of thousands of passably attractive shopgirls who were forever setting their caps—or whatever it was they set these days—for any half-way wealthy youth that happened along. Present-day Eves, awaiting the remunerative fall of modern Adams.

Montgomery and Sandra passed

him, and he smiled at them mechanically, and went on with his thoughts: A trip like this, a few days in Paris, and she would never be willing to return to the humdrum existence that had been her previous lot. And then——

Surely within that time he could break down those barriers of virtue with which she surrounded herself, which made her twice—a dozen times—as desirable! And if, in the end, it developed that her seductive air of virginity wasn't assumed, wasn't for barter, or to be swept away by a first heady gust of passion, then there were other ways. He would see to it that Tod married her. It wouldn't take her so very long to tire of him, to become wearied of his weaknesses, and when that moment came, he, Neal Gordon, would be there. Disillusioned wives weren't nearly as difficult as inexperienced maidens.

He closed his eyes and gave himself over to idle dreams. Life, he decided, could still have its piquant moments if one only took the trouble to prepare them in advance. . . . Stopping in their promenade to lounge against the rail, Denis said:

"Your friend Gordon didn't seem very glad to see me pop up just now."

"He doesn't approve of you," Sandra informed him with a laugh. "He told me so."

"I dare say," Montgomery observed dryly. "Didn't he happen to mention why?"

"You take up too much of my time."

"The pot," said Denis, "calling the kettle black. He watches over you like a guardian what-ever-it-is."

"Devil," Sandra prompted. "That's what you really mean, isn't it?"

"One can't help hearing stories," he muttered, tamping tobacco into his pipe. "Apparently he thinks every woman is fair game." He glanced

cheerfully down at her. "He's got a lot to learn, eh?"

Sandra looked out over the sea, an enigmatic smile curving her lips.

"Yes," she murmured, "he has a great deal to learn!"

Montgomery cocked an inquisitive eye at her. Had she meant anything by that, or not? He shook the feeling off, and said brusquely:

"Well, and that's that, and here we are. I mean to say, I'm beginning to like you rather a lot, Sandra."

For a moment silence hung heavily between them, and then Sandra said quietly:

"You shouldn't, Denis."

"Why not?"

She looked up at him. "It's nice having you like me, but see that it doesn't go any further, won't you?"

To gain time he applied another match to his already burning pipe:

"You mean, you are engaged?"

She shook her head.

"Then, why on earth——"

Placing a slender hand on his coat sleeve, Sandra said:

"Please, Denis, let's just be friends."

He stared at her frankly puzzled, for a space, and then with a characteristic gesture shook his head:

"I can't promise, but I'll try for a bit. The rest of the day, anyhow."

Freshening up in her stateroom before luncheon, she wondered if she were being a fool. Denis Montgomery was straightforward, clean-cut and honest looking. If she had let him continue, just now, he would undoubtedly have asked her to marry him. Would he, though? Tod hadn't, and she had once thought that Tod was everything that was fine and wonderful. Men, she remembered Kit saying, were all the same."

And if they weren't, she couldn't afford to take the chance of finding out. She had warned Denis off; now he could look after himself.

The days passed quickly. In the morning there was tennis or swimming with Denis, in the afternoon bridge and lazy hours in a deck chair, and in the evening there was dancing and more bridge. Always, too, somewhere in the offing, there was Neal Gordon. Sandra herself saw to that.

He cut in on her while she was dancing with Denis Montgomery. Denis released her with reluctant arms, and Gordon pivoted expertly towards a corner.

"Let's get out of this," he suggested. "If you must dance we'll go up to the grill."

"You don't like the music here?"

"I don't like the competition," he admitted.

"Or is it," Sandra asked innocently, "that you mistrust your success in an open field?"

He shot her a sharp glance, and she answered him with a smile.

"I only wanted to tell you how ravishing you looked this evening," he protested. "Won't you give me the opportunity?"

The music stopped and he moved with her into the lounge. Tonight she was wearing a gown of heavy satin, its color reflecting all the tawny high lights of her hair, and when she moved its softly silken folds caressed languidly every lovely line of her body. The things that Gordon was telling her now her mirror had already told her, although not quite as boldly.

"A nude in unburnished gold," he announced, his eyes sweeping frankly over her.

"You'll frighten me into wearing a cape," she warned him teasingly, sinking deeper into the cushions.

"I wish I might," he admitted, "and then we could go out on deck together. This is our last night, you know."

She shook her head. "Later per-

haps, but not now. I'm playing bridge in a moment."

"With the Jepsons?"

"And Ned Harris."

"You shouldn't," he grumbled. "You can't afford to gamble. Not with the few dollars you have."

She looked at him thoughtfully through lowered lashes, and then smiled:

"All life is a gamble, isn't it?"

The Jepsons came up to claim her for their game, and he let her go, saying:

"I'll look in on you later."

When they were seated at the card-table Nell Jepson said:

"Gordon the grumpy didn't seem at all pleased to have you leave."

"He's afraid I'm going to lose my shirt playing," Sandra laughed.

"And he'd like to be able to buy you a new one," Harris cut in. . . "The usual stakes?"

"Yes," Sandra agreed, and then suddenly a glow of inspiration came into her eyes. Without picking up her cards she leaned over the table and addressed her companions.

Two hours later Neal Gordon wandered casually into the card-room and sank into a chair beside her. Out of the corners of her eyes, Sandra sent him a mournful look. He leaned over and scanned the score tally, and pursed his lips.

"Luck bad?" he asked, when the hand was finished.

"Frightful!" she admitted huskily. As she picked up her cards, her evening bag slid from her lap on to the floor. Gordon retrieved it for her, and she thanked him with a wan smile.

"I'll hold it for you," he offered. "You are quite badly down, aren't you?" he added, in a low voice.

With the faintest of tremors, Sandra said:

"About four hundred."

A sudden crafty light came and went in Gordon's eyes. Four hundred down! He doubted if she had that much. Two hundred—or three hundred at the utmost. He wet his thin lips with the tip of his tongue, and twisted her bag between long, nervous fingers, snapping it open and shut.

He heard Jepson saying, "That's game and rubber," and then with a sidelong glance observed Sandra waiting tensely. Harris finished totalling the score:

"You are four hundred and thirty down, Miss Morton. Frightful luck!"

"I hope I have enough with me." Sandra felt in her lap, and then turned to Gordon. "You have my bag?"

With a queer smile he handed it to her. In a low murmur he said:

"The promenade deck, in half an hour." He turned quickly and left.

Sandra opened the bag in which a few hours before she had placed a slim folder of traveler's checks, a lace handkerchief, and a compact.

Crammed on top of the other contents were five one-hundred-dollar bills!

Gordon drew her into a secluded corner of the promenade deck. There was a trace of possession in the manner in which his fingers lingered on her arm, in the way he leaned closer.

The great ship rose and fell rhythmically as it ploughed its way through heavy seas; the muted strains of a dance orchestra seeped out through opened doors and windows and was whisked away by the wind, occasional couples in search of privacy sauntered by. . .

Without releasing the caressing grasp of his fingers on her arm, Gordon spoke at last. The one word:

"Well?"

Slowly Sandra turned toward him:

"It was a mess I got myself into, wasn't it?" she said at length. "What *would* I have done if you hadn't been there!"

Gordon laughed. A pleased, self-satisfied laugh that sent a faint current of apprehension coursing through Sandra.

"Need you worry about that now?"

"But of course! I mean, after all, I owe you five hundred dollars. Where on earth will I get that amount to repay you?"

Gordon's clasp on her arm grew tighter. After a moment he asked smoothly:

"Will you need that?" She looked at him questioningly. "To repay me."

"I—I am afraid I don't understand."

Gordon gave another short laugh:

"I think you do. There are always ways in which a charming woman can settle her debts—without using money."

"Oh!" Sandra twisted under his hand and stared steadily up at him. "So you are that sort, too!"

"And you," Gordon cut in sharply, "are you the sort of woman who always takes something—for nothing?"

She flung her head back swiftly. "I have paid for everything I have had from life so far. And I shall pay you, too!" Her mouth curved in a mocking, disdainful smile, as she added: "If you have reached the point where you have to *buy* women, I shall be only too glad!"

A dark rush of color flooded Neal Gordon's face. He said harshly:

"You misunderstand me."

"You made yourself clear enough."

In exasperation at himself, at her, he flung away his cigarette:

"You didn't give me an opportunity to finish. I will admit that I want you—that I want you tremendously. I shan't attempt to buy you, however." He looked at her searchingly.

for a moment, and then after a slight pause continued: "You have already told me a great deal about yourself, about your past; of this trip and the little that the future promises you. You planned to spend two weeks abroad. Why not make it longer, make it three months, six months? All that I ask is that you put yourself under my care for that time; let me give you the clothes and the background that rightfully belong to you."

"And in return——?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "That is all. I am asking only for a definite length of time—of *your* time." For a brief moment he almost believed he was being sincere. Then he looked down at her, standing silently before him, and he remembered how she had appeared earlier in the evening, her pagan beauty wrapped in a revealing sheath of satin, and desire flamed to a white heat. His hands trembled as he placed them on her shoulders and asked huskily:

"Is it a bargain, Sandra?"

"Yes," she said at last, in a low voice. "Yes. It is a bargain."

She remained silent until he left her, and had disappeared around a turn in the deck. Then she raised her eyes, looked out at the sea, and laughed softly.

V

SHE was turning to go down to her cabin when Denis Montgomery found her.

"Look here," he demanded, with a laugh, "what do you mean by deserting me like this on our last night?"

Disregarding her faint protests he guided her towards a pair of steamer chairs lost in the shadows made by an angle of the deck, and placed her in one. Then he continued:

"I can't let you go like this, Sandra! You know that."

"But I warned you, Denis."

"You can't warn love away, you know. And why should you try? You do like me a bit, don't you?"

Sandra closed her eyes, as though by so doing she could shut out his nearness. His tantalizing nearness! As from afar she heard her voice saying:

"I like you tremendously, Denny."

"Then why?"

"Please!" He had leaned forward; his arm rested for support across her knees, and a vibrant quiver of response rippled over her, leaving weakness in its wake. His voice sounded soothingly in her ears, she wanted it to go on and on forever.

She was being weak, and she realized it. She had made up her mind, steeled herself against all mankind, and now when one man came along and murmured words of love every nerve in her body throbbed in answer. For one wild moment, feeling the strength of his arm as it rested across her, she was tempted to say "yes" to Denis—come what would—and then all the past rolled up to confront her, and strengthen her.

Anyway, it was too late now! She had already given her word to Neal Gordon.

She heard Denis saying again, "I love you, Sandra! I love you so much!" and then, before she could protest, his arms were around her, and his mouth was against hers.

For the ecstasy of one long-drawn-out moment she let it remain there, conscious of the stinging ebb and flow of passion suddenly let loose within her, and then she pushed him gently away. When she tried to speak, she found that her voice trembled, yet at last she managed to say:

"That's for good-by, Denis. And now, good night."

"I won't let you go!" he protested hotly. "You *must* listen to me!"

She reached out and placed her fingers over his lips:

"It won't do either of us any good."

His only answer was to kiss the tips of her fingers, and then draw her closer to him again. Sandra saw all the carefully built-up walls of her plans crumbling into dust around her. Briefly she yielded to his caress, to the pressure of his lips; her body pliant within his arms. Then she quickly thrust her way to freedom.

There was a breathless catch in her voice as she said:

"Go now, Denny, please!"

As he stood there, motionless before her, all the pent-up emotions of the past fortnight beat in upon her; it was a world of men from which there was no escape.

"Go!" she cried, stamping her foot. "Go, damn you, go!"

Her first weeks in Paris passed in a hectic whirl. Gordon established her in an apartment at the Continental, near enough to the Crillon, where he himself was staying. The idea of separate hotels was a touch on which he prided himself, the allaying of suspicion before it arose.

The first week was given over to the couturiers,—Patou, Champcommunal, Jenny; the thousand and one shops that go to make Paris a paradise for women. Neal Gordon accompanied her, showing a neat and sophisticated taste in women's things, and an appreciative eye for the mannequins.

Once or twice Sandra was moved to protest at his extravagance. He waved her objections aside.

"These three months are mine," he reminded her.

Often, when he was with her, a puzzled look came into his eyes as he studied her. What manner of wo-

man are you really, it seemed to say. Am I right, or am I wrong?

And always she was conscious of his appraising glance roving freely over her; whenever she appeared in a new dress not a contour of her figure escaped his notice.

Daily she tried to forget Denis, as she had once tried so hard to forget Tod, but there were ever-present reminders of him. In some manner he had discovered her address; there were constant gifts of books and flowers from him. Try as she would she could not succeed in thrusting his image back in her mind. . . .

Sitting on the *terrasse* at Maxim's, one afternoon of her third week in Paris, waiting for Gordon, she was suddenly startled by a strident, familiar shriek:

"Sandy!"

She looked up quickly to confront Kit; a Kit dressed to the ultimate word in the latest spectacular model from the Rue de la Paix.

"But how on earth—" Sandra demanded, after the first rush of greetings had subsided.

Kit lounged back in her chair, and ostentatiously tapped a jeweled finger on the table-top, and giggled archly:

"I'm a fallen woman," she proclaimed.

"Since when?" Sandra asked dryly.

"The cradle," Kit admitted. "I fell out of that and got the habit. And here I am."

When Sandra continued to look puzzled she explained further:

"After you left, things got a little mopy. I mean, I didn't have any one to worry about, or nag, or anything, and I wasn't drawing much of anything but blanks. And then I met this gentleman, Mr. Goldheimer, who is a buyer from St. Louis. Well, one thing led to another, the way they will if you're not careful, and even if

you are, and the first thing I knew, Mr. Goldheimer said, 'How would you like to go to Paris, little girl?'

"Me, go to Paris!" I said.

"Yes," he said, 'Paris.'

"I can't go to Paris," I said.

"So he wanted to know why not, I couldn't go to Paris, and so I told him. I said, 'Mr. Goldheimer, I can't go to Paris because I have never been married.' Well, after giving me a funny look he wanted to know what that had to do with it. So I said, 'Why, Mr. Goldheimer, I understand that the only reason that American women go to Paris is to get divorces.' Then he laughed and said that anyway we could pretend; so here we are."

"Pretending you're married?" Sandra said.

"Pretending we're after a divorce," Kit protested. "It's not decent to pretend you're married when you aren't." Then she sobered suddenly: "But tell me about yourself; what you are doing and where you're living, and everything."

Sandra looked at the platinum wrist-watch that was Gordon's most recent gift. He was very late; it would serve him right if for once she didn't wait for him.

"I'm near by at the Continental," she said. "Come along."

Kit gave one look at the size of the apartment, and at the closets filled with clothes and the dressing-table laden with scents and lotions, then she turned to Sandra:

"Whatever you started out to do, it looks to me like you were succeeding."

"I suppose so," Sandra admitted listlessly, thinking of Denis.

"I was right, wasn't I," Kit went on, "about virtue being the bunk?"

"I don't know."

"What?" Kit said.

"I don't know."

"You don't mean," Kit protested blankly, "that you haven't—that you're still——"

Sandra nodded her head with a smile.

"You mean, you ain't putting out *anything* for all this!"

"Just my time."

"My God!" cried Kit, sinking into a chair and fanning herself. "From now on I believe in storks and what mama told me about cabbage patches."

Twice Sandra encountered Denis on the boulevards. Once she was just emerging from a fitting at Patou's, another time she was taking a mid-morning stroll up the Champs d'Elysées. Both times he begged her for engagements she dared not give him.

"But surely you can't be tied up for all the coming weeks," he protested.

Regretfully she shook her head:

"Only such moments as these are free."

"But——"

She tried not to look at his crinkly brown hair glistening in the sunlight, at the imploring look in his sombre eyes. How could she tell him that her time—all her waking moments—were Gordon's—bought and paid for? So she said nothing, contenting herself with looking about the café terrace on which they were sitting.

"After that night on the boat—our last night—I can't believe I haven't a chance," he went on. "I *won't* believe it!" With an uneasy laugh, he added: "I'm a stubborn brute, Sandra."

She allowed herself one fleeting look into the depths of his eyes and then turned quickly away.

"You make it very difficult for me."

"I don't want to do that. I want to make everything perfect for you. I want to bring the world and lay it at your adorable feet."

When she continued to remain silent, he said:

"You are too beautiful to be so cruel, Sandra."

"Cruel!" she flared, so suddenly that he jerked back in amazement. "You call *me* cruel?" She wanted now to hurt him, to repay him for all the nights of sleeplessness and longing he had given her. "Maybe I am, but from whom did I learn it? Tell me that, will you?" She rose swiftly to her feet, and cried down at him: "Men! Do you hear? Men! men! men!"

She signaled a passing taxi and jumped into it, leaving a bewildered Denis to stare after her.

In November Gordon decided that the Paris season was drawing to a close; they would, he suggested casually, move slowly south, winding up for the holidays, in Nice or Monte Carlo.

"You'll like it," he told her. "It will be a change, and you will meet interesting people."

Sandra wondered idly if his words held any hidden meaning—if, by chance, he had seen her with Montgomery the odd times they had been together. They were lunching at *Ciro's*, and she looked now about at the superbly gowned women, the suavely tailored men, and wondered if it were possible that she was the same Sandra Morton of three months ago—the Sandra Morton who worked in the Eastern Insurance Company, and shared a one-room apartment in Greenwich Village with a girl called Kit.

She looked up to see Denis Montgomery entering the restaurant. His eyes roved restlessly over the room, until at last they met hers for an instant. Sandra gave him a fleeting smile, and a nod, and returned to her salad.

"We seem to be forever bumping into Montgomery," Gordon observed gloomily. "I thought he was on his way back to England."

Sandra sipped from her glass of sauterne.

"He may have had reason to change his mind," she suggested demurely.

Gordon looked sharply at her. "We must certainly leave Paris at once," he said at last. "It's becoming quite deadly here."

VI

ON the Riviera there were a thousand distractions. Gambling and the opera at Monte, long drives over the upper Corniche road, tennis at Nice and racing at Cannes.

Kit appeared out of nowhere, Mr. Goldheimer's successor in tow. Gordon didn't approve of Kit, but Sandra was adamant on that point.

"I am giving you my time," she told him, "not my friends."

And then Denis came.

She gave him one short hour, an hour of leisurely sauntering along the Promenade des Anglais. But when he attempted to renew his suit, she silenced him.

"You know I'll go on asking you," he insisted, "forever and a day."

She stopped, and leaning on the balustrade, looked out over the blue waters of the Mediterranean. She turned back to him.

"Ask me four weeks and a day from now," she said at last. "Four weeks from tomorrow."

Four weeks, and then her three months with Gordon would be ended, her plans, whatever they might be for the future, made.

She knew now how difficult it would be for her to return to New York and the life that had previously been her lot; how easy it would be

for her to remain in Europe—on certain terms.

As the three months drew to a close Gordon himself changed gradually. The questioning, quizzical look with which he had often regarded her had by now become almost a fixed expression. Once over cocktails at the Casino de Paris, in Monte Carlo, he said casually: "Are you sure, Sandra, that when this vacation is over, you wouldn't like to remain under different circumstances?"

"Only if I loved some one very much," she answered him.

He made a wry mouth. "Meaning, I suppose, that you don't love me." He fingered the stem of his wine-glass. "You might learn in time."

She smiled lazily, enigmatically, at him, and said nothing. Already she had learned a great deal.

Gordon sighed, and looked at his watch.

That night he cabled for Tod.

Sandra stepped out of her bath and allowed Celeste, the maid, to enfold her first in warm, soft towelling, and then to dust powder down the silken smoothness of her back. Drawing on delicately tinted lingerie of sheer chiffon and lace, she sat before the dressing-table while Celeste continued her administrations.

The finishing touches were being put to her hair when the bell of the apartment rang.

"M'sieu Montgomery," Celeste announced, returning.

Denis! But what— Suddenly, Sandra realized that he must have mistaken the day. It was tomorrow that he was to come for his answer.

"Tell him," she directed, "tell him—" Then the thought of his misunderstanding, of his going away forever, frightened her. "I'll see him myself," she finished hastily.

Slipping into a *négligé* of trans-

parent velvet, she added a final touch of color to her cheeks and went in to him.

He was standing, his back towards her, staring out of the window into the Place Massena.

"Denis," she said, "you must have made a mistake. It was tomorrow you were to come."

He turned on her swiftly, his face drawn and white.

"Oh, I made a mistake, right enough," he said bitterly, "but not about tomorrow."

Her hand flew to her throat as she said with rising inflection:

"Yes?"

He glowered across the room at her:

"I was a fool, not to have guessed before! All these months when you couldn't find time to be with me, yet had hours on end to spend with Gordon. I should have known then!"

"What is it that you should have known, Denis!" Sandra asked quietly, while her heart turned over a thousand times.

"Good God! You ask me that! What all the Riviera knows, that's what. That you are Neal Gordon's mistress!"

"Yes," she said slowly, "I suppose that is what you—what every one—would think."

She sank into a chair, and stared thoughtfully before her.

"It's true, isn't it?" Montgomery shouted down at her, and when she didn't answer he said: "You needn't bother to lie."

She threw up her head. "Why should I lie to you?" she cried. "Why should I lie to any man? Believe what you like; whatever I told you, you'd doubt me in the end."

With a hopeless gesture Denis muttered:

"But don't you see, Sandra——"

A sharp peal of the bell interrupted

him. Celeste's slender ankles tripped across the room, and she opened the door to admit Gordon and Tod Walker.

Oblivious of Montgomery's presence, Tod took a swift step forward, and cried:

"Sandra!"

For one startled moment Sandra's eyes grew wide with surprise, and then they hardened.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," she said coldly.

"But you don't understand, Sandra," Tod protested. "Don't you see? I mean, my uncle has said I can marry you. Now! Whenever I like."

"So?" Sandra looked mockingly at him, and then faced Gordon. "At least, you seem anxious to keep me in the family!"

For the first time the two men became aware of Montgomery standing near the window. Gordon said smoothly:

"Perhaps we should postpone our discussion until later."

He was turning to lead Tod out when Sandra cried:

"Wait!" They hesitated on the threshold, turned back, and she went on hurriedly:

"Our three months are up today, Neal Gordon. We are quits, but before you leave I've something to say, and I want Denis to hear me. I owe him that much."

She walked over and stood in front of Gordon. Speaking clearly, coldly, she said:

"Before you met me you wouldn't let Tod marry me. I wasn't good enough; I wasn't good enough to be anything but his mistress! And then you met me, and you thought it was a huge joke that you should have

stumbled on the girl you had denied Tod.

"That's what you thought at first, and later, you, too, wanted me. When you couldn't get me one way, you tried another! I knew; all along I knew what you were attempting. And if it hadn't been for Denis I wouldn't have given a damn!"

"But you've tried—you've tried hard! With money, and jewels and clothes, you've tried to make me come to you. And now that you've failed, you decided that I'm good enough—good enough for Tod!"

She stopped and drew a long breath:

"Maybe I am, but you're not good enough for me—either one of you. I wouldn't take you if you were the last men on earth, and I was but one woman out of millions starving for passion.

"Now go—go, and be damned to you!"

When the door closed, she turned and started for the boudoir. From the embrasure by the window Denis said:

"Sandra!"

Over her shoulder she looked at him.

"Sandra," he said, coming forward, "I've been a frightful fool. Can't you understand? Can't you forgive me?" He came closer, and knelt beside her, holding her knees within his arms, looking up at her. "I'll spend the rest of my life trying to make you forget," he said.

Sandra looked down at him, and then raised her head, a smile of triumph in her eyes.

"You'll have to try very hard," she warned.

"All my life!" he promised her.

MARRIED LIFE

By Florence A. Kilpatrick

"MY wife is a splendid little woman. We're the best of pals and I think the world of her, but—" here Mr. Joseph Wheeler paused to flick the ash from his expensive cigar, to bend towards his confidant and slightly lower his voice—"she doesn't care for married life. *That* side of it, you know."

Mr. Borthwick who was his fellow passenger, for they were sitting in the vast smoking-room of the Atlantic liner, nodded sagaciously. It is on board ship more than any place in the universe that people become most confidential, so eager to reveal the inner secrets of their souls, but Joseph Wheeler was an expansive type of man under any circumstances. He was handsome, rather over-nourished, shining and well groomed, prosperous in business, generous, affable in his manner and considered by all who knew him—including his wife—as a jolly good fellow.

"Now when a woman doesn't care for married life," he went on, "her husband—if he's a decent sort of chap—ought to respect her wishes. That's what I've always done and we hit it off all right."

Mr. Borthwick regarded his newly found friend with doubt, feeling perhaps that his appearance did not suggest any denials of the flesh. "Somehow I can't see you leading the life of a celibate."

Joseph gave vent to his deep jolly laugh. "Well, as for that, I don't mind

telling you that I have a little friend. Charming girl. I think the world of her. Known her for four years now."

"I don't approve of that sort of thing," said Mr. Borthwick, shaking his head. "Risky. Might smash up your life as easy as not. Is it worth it, I always say. Now if your wife were to find out——"

"But that's just it, my dear chap. It's really quite safe and sound if only you know how to manage these things. And nothing could be easier. I live in the country, but I have my business to attend to in town, of course. My wife doesn't care for town and never goes up unless it's actually necessary. As for the little girl, well, she understands everything. She's a real pal. And if I see her once a week what harm does it do any one? I'm happy, she's happy and the wife's happy because I don't bother her."

He paused here in order to press the bell and summon the bar steward, saying that this time it was his turn; and after the drinks had been set before them and duly consumed Mr. Borthwick called aloud for the bar steward because now it had come to his turn to order refreshments, this ritual being one of the immutable laws of civilization.

At last the two rose, unwillingly, but it was time to dress for dinner, promising, however, to meet again before the meal in order to drink an appetizer. Mr. Borthwick making his way to his cabin, meditated on Joseph, thinking what a fine fellow he

was. A good mixer—one of the best.

While Joseph, his mind still on his secret confidences, decided that he would show his friend the presents he was taking home to his wife, Beatrice, and the little girl, Mollie. He had just pulled off a successful business deal in New York and before embarking for home had entered Tiffany's in a particularly generous mood. Those long diamond earrings, now, they were just the thing for Mollie. A bit exaggerated, perhaps, but she could wear them, having such a graceful, slender neck. There was something barbaric to his mind in the idea of women fastening jewels to their flesh. It amused him to think how he would screw these into Mollie's ears, to tighten the fasteners, perhaps, for fun, until the pretty soft little ears got quite pink. . . . Ah, it would be good to see her again! . . .

The diamond arrow brooch was for Beatrice. It would look well on a black velvet evening frock—he liked her to wear black velvet—and she was particularly fond of diamond ornaments. Dear old Beatrice, he'd missed her, and he knew well enough that she had missed him. She always declared that the house seemed dead when he was out of it. Traveling was all very well, but it was good to get back home again. Only men who were happy in their domestic life understood that.

A few days later Mr. Borthwick and Joseph parted, promising to look each other up, to keep in touch, even to drop a line, so certain did they feel that a friendship had been formed which even the tarnishing hand of time could not destroy. Mr. Borthwick proceeded to do a great deal of business in a very short time and then returned to his home, which was in Illinois, without getting in touch with Joseph and very soon forgot all about him, such being the healthy and

natural end to most liner friendships. While Joseph, who had begun to regret his mid-ocean confidences, decided that he would never have time, after all, to drop a line to Mr. Borthwick, returned to his beautiful place in Surrey, and enjoyed the agreeable welcome that was always awaiting him after his absence from home.

A special dinner was served. Cook was particularly anxious that it should be what she termed "just so." Didn't the master always tease her when he got back from one of his New York trips by saying that the Americans were the only people in the world who knew how to serve up a meal fit for an Englishman? The gardener had sent in special flowers for the table. Joseph was very proud of his garden, and insisted on making a tour of inspection almost as soon as he arrived. Beatrice was at his side smiling at his enthusiasm in the motherly fashion she always adopted for her "big boy."

"Anything happen while I've been away, honey?"

"Nothing much, Joe. Symonds says there's a lot of blight on the fruit trees, and the caterpillars have played havoc with the roses——"

Here the conversation, since they were both keen gardeners, became purely horticultural.

The "special" dinner consumed, Joseph stretched himself in the deep leather chair in his study, pulled at his cigar, sipped the mellow golden liquid known as Benedictine, sighed with contentment and murmured, "Ah, it's good to be home again."

Beatrice, sitting opposite to him, embroidering a piece of fine linen, looked up and smiled. She was the calm, reposeful type of woman, possessing the gift of being able to make a perfect home of any house over which she would preside. Joseph thought how charming and dignified

she looked in her black velvet evening frock—that Tiffany brooch certainly looked effective. Then his thoughts wandered to that other little leather box that was in the breast pocket of his coat upstairs: the earrings he had bought for Mollie. He pulled more thoughtfully at his cigar.

"By the way, my dear," he said at last, "I expect I shall have to stay in town tomorrow night."

"I'll see that your suitcase is packed, dear. But I do wish the tiresome old business didn't snatch you away just when you've got back from your American trip." A faint sigh escaped her.

"Fraid I can't get out of this, Trix. Business is business, you know and it does pile up in my absence. That chap Mason I told you about, is only here for a few days, and as it happens he can't spare the time to see me until the evening."

"Oh, I quite understand, Joe dear, but it's a shame your having so much to do."

He smiled to himself, for he rather enjoyed weaving these little fictions; it gave him a delightful sense of adventure and intrigue. Tomorrow he would see Mollie again, would fasten the earrings in her pink little ears. She certainly had the cutest ears! . . .

"Tired, Joe?"

"No. I was just thinking how fine it is to be back here again."

"What a one you are for your own home, dear."

Yes, he thought, he really was extremely domesticated. Perhaps that was why he felt so contented. He was particularly pleased with life just then and indeed he had reason to be. Next morning, when he bade Beatrice good-by before departing for the City, not the faintest hint of any cloud dimmed the brightness of his horizon. Meditating on the pleasant evening that lay before him, he went to the florist's

and ordered a sheaf of red roses to be sent to Mollie's apartment. During the day he telephoned to her place of business—she had always insisted on remaining at her job in spite of his protests. Neither would she be induced to leave her tiny flat for more luxurious apartments. There was nothing grasping or calculating about her. She was just the sort of little girl who loved him for himself alone and never seemed to have a thought for any one else.

It seemed to him, when she replied to his call, that her voice sounded a little short and unusual. Perhaps it was because she didn't like his telephoning during business hours; she was rather particular about that sort of thing. But he was glad to know that she was free to meet him that evening. They were going to have a delightful dinner together. He would be at the flat at seven o'clock as usual.

He arrived a little before that hour, looking so handsome, shining, prosperous and good-tempered that he positively exuded well-being. He was extraordinarily delighted to see his "little girl" again, clasping her in his arms with much warmth.

"You can't tell how I've missed you, honey. Never as much as looked at any other woman for three weeks, I give you my word."

He made a point of honor of his fidelity to her during his visits abroad. In his ardor and the joy of embracing her once more he scarcely noticed that Mollie did not return his caresses, but even drew from him a little abruptly.

"But you're dying to know what I've brought for you," he said pinching her cheek teasingly. "Now guess."

"I—I didn't expect anything, Joe."

"You thought I'd go all the way to New York and come back without a present for you! Nonsense. Ah, that's the place for shops. It's got Paris and even London knocked into a cocked

hat. I'd just like to take you shopping there, girly. It's a paradise for women. I say, you know, how d'ye think these will suit you?"

He unfastened a parcel he had brought with him, winking slyly as he displayed the flimsy garments of the finest silk and exquisite cobwebby lace. This is not the sort of thing he would have bought for Beatrice. She would, indeed, have been slightly shocked at the idea of his entering a shop to order such intimate apparel. Also she preferred something "sensible" that would stand the ordeal of washing.

"But I've brought you another little surprise." He took the jewel case from his pocket. "Just look at those and tell me how you like them."

"They're wonderful, Joe." She regarded the diamonds sparkling on the bed of white velvet; but made no attempt to take them out of the case.

"Well, aren't you going to try them on, girly?"

"I can't, Joe."

He was now aware that something was definitely wrong. What had he unconsciously done to vex her? Women, he always declared, were extremely like race-horses—touchy, high-spirited, nervy creatures so that you never really knew where you were with them. Yet it wasn't like Mollie to get into tantrums over fancied wrongs.

"Have I done anything to annoy you?" he inquired anxiously, troubled at the way she shrank from his touch.

"No, of course you haven't. Only everything has got to finish between us, Joe. You've been very good to me—generous, and all that. I hope you won't take it badly—that you'll soon forget."

"You don't care for me any more, Mollie?" He was terribly shaken. "What have I done to vex you, sweetie?"

"Nothing, nothing, only—I'm in love with some one, and he with me. We're engaged to be married."

"Is it any one I know?"

"No. I only met him myself a few weeks ago. He works in my office—one of the new under managers. He's a darling—and so clever. He's sure to make his way in the world. Oh, you can't imagine how happy I am." She was dimpled and smiling now, a look of infinite tenderness in her blue eyes.

"Does he know about me—that is, us?" demanded Joseph a little brutally.

The smile faded, she looked anxious, half-frightened. "Indeed, no. I couldn't have told him, Joe. He never would have understood. Before I knew him it didn't seem to matter much, but now I see that it was all wrong and I want to forget it. I shall try to make amends. And I mean to make him happy."

"You ought to—you've had experience," he retorted bitterly. As she shrank back quivering at this remark, he added contritely: "Forgive me, girly, I didn't mean to say that, but I'm feeling bad about it all. To lose you like this! But I suppose it was inevitable. How old is he?"

"Twenty-eight. Would you like to see him?" She actually produced a photograph and held it towards him with pride. Joseph frowned. Really women had no sense of the fitness of things. He looked at the picture with distaste, grudgingly admitting—but only to himself—that the chap had good looks. Twenty-eight—and he was forty-nine! Not that he looked his age by a long chalk. He had kept his figure and that special hair lotion he used so assiduously had kept him from going gray. Golf and regular exercise made him fit, and he often boasted that he didn't feel a day more than thirty. Nevertheless, he was

acutely reminded just then of his forty-nine years. He knew he could not deny middle age.

As she stood there looking so rapturously at the photograph, Joseph felt a certain resentment towards her—to drop him like this after five years and yet if he had left her he would have felt like a cad. Women seemed to have no conscience in some things. He found himself considering the engagement ring she was wearing on her left hand. It hadn't cost a penny more than twenty pounds, and he'd given five hundred dollars in New York for those earrings which she now refused.

He watched her go to a small desk under the window and bring out a cardboard box. "I've got here all the jewelry you ever bought me, Joe," she said. "And I wish you'd take it back again. It wouldn't be right for me to keep it now."

She opened the box which contained the pearl necklace, the diamond wristlet-watch, the bracelet and brooch of sapphires—he had chosen them to match her eyes he said. He lifted up the trinkets and looked at them regretfully. They represented to him happy hours and delightful little celebrations. It had all been such fun. And now it was finished.

Mollie seemed to regard those recollections in a different light.

"I did wrong and I hope I shan't be punished," she said passionately. "I wish to God it had never happened and that we'd never met, you and I."

The rage and exasperation in her voice shocked him. He was more hurt than he would own; after all he had done to give her a good time and make her happy!

"What do you expect me to do with these trinkets?" he asked with sarcasm. "Take them home to my wife and say they're from a young lady who has no further use for them. Or shall I sell or pawn them?"

"Please, Joe, don't be unkind. I know how you must feel, but can't you see that it's impossible for me to keep this expensive jewelry. What would Geoff think——"

"Then chuck it in the river, but don't insult me by asking me to take it back again." He got up. "I'd better be going now. Shall I be seeing you again, Mollie?"

"I think it's better that we shouldn't. Good-by, Joe."

"You're not even going to kiss me for the last time?"

"As you wish." But it was obvious that she was reluctant. How often had he held her in his arms, thrilling to the response of her lips, the yielding of her soft form to his embrace. Now she was rigid, and the kiss she gave him was perfunctory.

"Good-by, Mollie."

"Good-by, Joe."

"You'll let me send you a wedding present?"

"I'd rather you didn't—*please*, Joe."

There was nothing more to be said. Five minutes later he was driving back to his hotel, meditating bitterly on this unexpected turn of events. He took it badly. Without being aware of it, he had dropped into the settled habits of middle age. Mollie had been more than an "affair." She had become part of his life, an accepted factor in the régime of his pleasant existence. For days he brooded over his lost romance until Beatrice began to worry about his dejected air, and declare that he must be run down and in need of a holiday. Her solicitude soothed his injured pride—here at all events was a woman who loved and appreciated him.

As his ruffled feelings gradually became smoothed, he began to put Mollie in the background of his thoughts, and he was considerably taken aback when he recognized her handwriting on a letter that came to him by the

morning post about a fortnight after their final parting. This amazing indiscretion annoyed him; to write to him at his house, a thing she had never done before! Supposing Beatrice had seen the letter, even innocently opened it had he been absent; the mere thought of such a contingency made his brow moist and sent shivers down his spine. He tore open the envelope with more irritation than curiosity. The sheet of paper contained but one line:

"I must see you at the flat tonight. Don't fail me. M."

What could it mean? It was unlike Mollie to be mysterious. He began to speculate on the reason for that curious summons. The little girl had probably come to her senses (very much quicker than he had imagined) and realized her foolishness in breaking with him so completely. Or could it be that the young man had discovered about their liaison—

"You seem very absorbed, dear. Have you had any bad news," said Beatrice, beaming at him across the breakfast table.

He started guiltily. "No—nothing important. . . . Oh, by the way, I may be detained in town this evening. If I can't get back tonight I'll phone you."

"Very well, dear. I'll order your suitcase to be put in the car at once," said the faithful and exemplary Beatrice.

It was with a renewed sense of adventure that Joseph made his way to Mollie's flat that evening. Perhaps if that chap had chucked the little girl—a beastly caddish thing to do—it might make his arrangement with Mollie more solid and settled for the future; give her a lesson, in fact. He began to meditate on a peace-offering in the form of jewelry, and the joys of reconciliation.

But confronted by the "little girl"

all hope of the pleasant evening he had contemplated vanished. This was Mollie in a strange mood, with set lips and tragic eyes. It made him feel uncomfortable, for he always declared that pretty women—bless their little hearts—should look happy and care-free.

"Is anything wrong?" he demanded.

"Wrong?" She flung out her hands with a despairing gesture. "If you knew what I've suffered since I last saw you!"

Joseph felt concerned—and more than a little disappointed. A suffering woman does not make a very entertaining companion for an evening's outing. He saw that he must resign himself to the rôle of comforter, for it was now quite evident that the young man had deserted her and she needed moral support. But as it happened it was he who needed the support for her next words, so totally unexpected threw him into a condition of alarm and dismay bordering on panic.

"I'm going to have a baby," she said.

For some moments he stared at her as if stupefied. The significance of what he had just heard dawned slowly upon him and it left him for the moment speechless.

"Somehow the idea of that happening never occurred to me," she went on. "But after I'd been to see the doctor and he told me the truth, I thought I should have gone crazy. It has just smashed up everything."

"My poor little girl." He had taken her hand which lay cold and inert in his grasp. "We mustn't make too much of a tragedy of this. Something can be done. I've heard of a man, absolutely reliable, who can help you. You'll soon be all right again and no one but ourselves will be any the wiser."

She snatched her hand away from

him with a shudder. "If you think I'd consent to that you're mistaken. I've got to go through with it. . . . I must." There was a moment's pause, and then she added in a flat voice, "I've told Geoff."

Joseph, startled out of his usual amiable and jolly-good-fellow attitude, looked anxious and annoyed. "My dear girl, was it necessary to let him know. Surely it would have been better to have waited!"

"You think I ought to have tried to deceive him, if it were possible; how little you understand, Joe, how I feel about this. I've given Geoff up for good. It was a terrible shock to him, but I saw how it changed him towards me when he knew the truth. Any decent man would feel that way."

"Poor little girlie, I can't tell you how I feel at bringing all this trouble on you," he said, remorseful now. "Why not let me arrange for you to go away. Perhaps something might happen——"

"But I don't want anything to happen," she interrupted. "You don't understand me—the way I feel."

This suggestion surprised Joseph. He had always heard when these unfortunate things happened—and they *would* happen somehow in spite of everything—that any little girl similarly placed was anxious to get out of the trouble at all costs. It scarcely seemed decent of Mollie to take such an attitude. However, he would make things as easy as possible for her. It was well that she'd got in with a straight chap like himself who was prepared to do the right thing. His manner became gentle, solicitous, almost fatherly.

"Well, if you mean to go through with it, you mustn't worry unduly," he said benignly. "I'll fix everything up. And I give you my solemn promise that I'll fix a settled sum on the—on you both so that you never need

worry about the financial side of things."

"I'm not worrying about that," she replied. "And I'm afraid it isn't going to be quite so easy for you as you imagine, Joe. The child is yours as well as mine and it must bear your name. You will have to arrange to marry me."

"Is your mind getting unhinged with this trouble, girlie? Marry you—when I'm already married!"

"Your wife must divorce you."

The idea seemed so preposterous, so fantastic even, that he almost laughed. "She'd never divorce me—nor would I consider it for an instant. Why, I think the world of Beatrice."

"Then why did you trouble about me?"

"Well, my dear, I'm sure I've explained. Beatrice is a wonderful little woman, we get on splendidly together, but she doesn't like married life."

"Then if she doesn't like it she won't mind giving it up."

"Don't be deliberately perverse, Mollie. I mean, she doesn't like *that* side of married life, and I'm a decent chap, I hope. I believe in delicacy in these matters, respecting a woman's scruples——"

"Then you'd better respect mine. The child *shall* have your name. You can't get out of this, Joe, because I tell you I'm desperate. There's only one way out. If you refuse to tell everything to Beatrice—then I shall go to her and plead myself."

He sprang to his feet, the color draining out of his ruddy cheeks. "Good God! You can't mean that you'd do that. You're only bluffing."

"I do mean it. Nothing you can say or do will make me change my mind. I gave up Geoff. You have to give up your wife. Even then, it's harder on me than you. If only you'd left me alone. I was nineteen when I first

met you, my life was so terribly dull and I longed for gayety and fun. Just fun, that was all, and see what it has brought us to." In a changed voice she added, "It isn't as if I want to marry you, Joe; I don't. But there's no other way."

He began to plead, to argue, to entreat, make extravagant offers. In vain. It was evident that she had taken a terrific decision and nothing could move her from it.

"I'll give you three days to explain to your wife, Joe, and if you don't arrange everything I shall see her myself."

He knew now that she meant what she said, and stared at her as if looking on a stranger. Her eyes, which showed signs of much weeping, were hard, her features looked pinched and drawn. Could this actually be the jolly, dimpled Mollie, with the soft breasts and responsive lips, his little girl, the plaything of his idle hours, now changed into a stern, determined young woman so bent on wrecking his life? He felt an urgent desire to be alone, to think out the catastrophe, and decide on some plan of action. Murmuring excuses and a promise to see her the following day, he made his way out of the flat and into the street.

His thoughts were in a frightful

tumult. They raced hither and thither in panic, always, however, returning to the same point. His pleasant world, in which he had figured as such a jolly good fellow, seemed to have crashed about his ears; his agreeable, comfortable life was ruined. He knew enough of Beatrice to be sure that when she knew all she would consider it her duty to divorce him. They had been such good pals, and spent such a happy life together. Having so much in common, too, what with gardening and bridge and liking the same friends. He hated to think of the pain and distress he was going to cause Beatrice.

Why was Mollie so perverse about it? Why should she make him suffer like this? It wasn't as if he'd done anything very wrong—just liking a little fun, that was all. It wasn't as if he'd ever been promiscuous like lots of chaps he knew, and *they* weren't landed in a frightful hole such as he was in now. It was the horrible injustice of it all that smote him. Standing on the edge of the pavement, Joseph looked upward and appealed to heaven—an unusual thing for him to do:

"Why should this have happened to me?" he mutely demanded. "*What have I done to deserve it?*"



IN A WEAK MOMENT

By Franklin P. Harry

LIL'S exasperation drew close to tears. The window above the front steps on which she was standing had just been slammed down upon the heels of a reply to the anxious inquiry she had called softly up to it; a positive reply that had confirmed her worst fears.

"France," she cried tensely, although she held her voice down as she turned to her companion, "did you hear that? Where in heaven's name, I ask you, did Lorrie let that bird take her? After me tellin' her in seven different languages to watch her step!"

"Aw, quit worryin'," France growled, shrugging deeper into his overcoat against the chill spring air. "It ain't your funeral, is it? B'lieve it or not, little simps like Lorrie ought to stay out in the country where they belong, if they're that easy!"

"I know, but the poor kid—" Lil suddenly dug her fingers into France's sleeve and shook him. "We've got to find her, France! We've got to! I'll make it my funeral! She's too sweet a kid—for *that*! Tell me where else we could look."

"I don't know," France hesitated. "Weber's got a little bungalow down on Middle River," he added reluctantly. "But, heck, Lil, that's a good fifteen miles from here." His tones grew plaintive. "I feel like hittin' the hay, myself."

"Get goin', France, else I'll go by myself, in a taxi!" Lil declared fiercely, starting in the direction of their car. "You can sleep all day tomorrow. If Lorrie's down there I mean to bring her home, and you listen to me speak my mind to Pat Weber when I get there!"

"I told you, right in the beginnin', that you'd have a handful in that girl," France grumbled, shooting the car into Fayette Street and unwillingly heading east. "Dizzy and dumb as you make 'em! Why, you couldn't see her head for the hayseeds!"

Merely a figure of speech on France's part, of course. Lorrie's bright little head with its satin-sleek covering of hair didn't show the faintest trace of a hayseed, although it did resemble the shining ripe wheat-stalks in the fields back home.

Lil had recently taken little Lorrie Mason under her warm, capable wing. Not because the girl had been wished on her, but because there was something in Lorrie that had awakened the mothering instinct of the older woman. It was Lorrie's blue—trustful blue eyes—perhaps; or it may have been her little girl mouth that had the pleasant habit of breaking so easily into smiles.

"Gosh," Lil had exclaimed, the first glimpse she had had of her, "the world's her oyster and I'll bet she don't even know how to hold the fork!"

She began to study the girl with increased interest, drinking in the

young loveliness with eager, pitying eyes.

"Now I ask you," she finally wailed to the world in general, "if that ain't a cryin' shame, a picture like that? Smack out of the sticks, in the bargain! Why," she added, "I'd be willin' to bet my boots that she'll fall for the first barnacle who comes along and feeds her his line like nobody's business!"

The surmise set her head to shaking sadly. A feeling of genuine pity took possession of her.

"Ain't got a snowball's chance!" she voiced with conviction.

It happened that Lorrie was put to work on the same floor of the factory with her. "Makin' straw lids for men," as Lil phrased it. Out of real goodness of heart Lil took it upon herself to hobnob with the pretty little newcomer. They ate their sandwiches together at noon, and it chanced that part of their way home at night lay in the same direction, so that they fell to walking it in each other's company.

"How you dissipatin' the hours of an evenin', kid?" she asked the girl, her disarming smile most amiable and friendly.

"I—I sew and read a great deal. And I've been to the movies several times," was the answer.

Lil eyed her closely.

"Got a heavy boy friend, I s'pose?"

"Oh, no. I went by myself," Lorrie confessed shyly, her eyes clear.

"Say, that's swell!" Lil cried.

"Then mebbe you'd like to go out with France 'n' me Sattad'y night, somewheres? France'll get you a man."

"Oh, I'd love it! It's—it's mighty nice in you, Lil, dear, to ask me!"

To Lil's surprise, the girl threw her arms around her and kissed her.

"Well, I don't know so much about that," Lil said frankly, touched by

the unexpected caress. "Bein' so nice, I mean. I had a fish I was itchin' to fry, although I really do want you to come with us. You see, kitten," she smiled down at the small thing beside her, her voice kind, "some hefty mouse is goin' to swallow you up, hide, ears, tail and all, if there ain't somebody around to look out for you till you learn your stuff. If it's okay with you, I'll suffer for the good cause an' try to keep you from gettin' into any kind of a mess while you're learnin' your way about?"

Lorrie nodded solemn acquiescence.

"Fine an' dandy!" Lil commented enthusiastically. "You leave it to me. I happen to know a couple of reasonably safe men I can introduce you to, although God knows, dearie, you need to keep your life-belt within easy grabbin' distance these days, when you're alone with anything under eighty years old!"

"I'll be careful, Lil," Lorrie promised.

"Oh, you mean to be, of course," Lil nodded wisely, "but any girl's likely to forget in a weak moment." Her eyes grew infinitely tender as they met the shy blue ones. "Look out for weak moments, dearie! The damned things come so unexpected!"

"Yes, Lil."

"All right, then, that's off my chest!" Lil sighed gustily. "Ever have a blind date?"

"No."

"It's where," Lil explained, "the high contractin' parties don't see each other till they're ready for the take-off."

"Oh, that would be fun!"

"Oh, yeah?" the disillusioned one drawled. "Don't you b'lieve it, though," she reluctantly conceded, "sometimes you do get a laugh over what you draw!"

She set to checking off the possibilities she had in mind.

"Bill says he can get Charlie Conners, or Al Stevens, or, maybe Pat Weber. Go ahead," she invited, "that ought to be enough to pick from."

"I'd—I'd like the man with the funny half-Irish and half-German name," Lorrie chose breathlessly.

"Who? Pat Weber?" The name brought a nod of approval from Lil. "He's got a swell job downstairs in the office, but he ain't a bit high-hat-tish. You gotta add a little Scotch to his make-up, though," she laughed, "because nobody ever accused him of bein' a free spender. Still," she said judiciously, "as long as he's reasonably safe for you, that's all we're askin'. If he should loosen up a bit," she warned, "just remember you're not expected to sell the old home-stead out of pure gratitude!"

"I'll—I'll remember, Lil." Lorrie's eyes dropped and she stood hesitant. "Lil," she whispered shyly, "is it necessary to tell him I'm from the country, or a whole lot about me? Couldn't you just say you—you had a girl for him and let him judge when he sees me?"

"You're learnin', kid, fast!" Lil laughed, eyeing her with increased respect. "Say," she cried, pleased with the idea, "I'll do just that! Won't give him a hint. And you can knock his eye out when he sees you!"

All of which Lorrie did, even as Lil predicted she would.

Lil went about it craftily. She asked Weber to help her entertain a litte girl friend, and she did it so apologetically that Weber hadn't a doubt that the date would prove anything but a complete washout. But he liked Lil and France, so he good-naturedly promised his aid.

He came in his own car, accordingly, wearing the face of a martyr, and he afforded Lil the kick of her life when she brought out Lorrie. . . The effect on him was amazing. De-

lightedly watching, Lil saw Weber's eyes widen as they lit upon the girl until they took on a completely dazed expression, while over his dark, clean-shaven features there crept a dull red for all the world like the blush of a bashful schoolboy. Imagine, from an old-timer like Pat! It was a complete K. O.!

"Boy!" she exulted, bringing him out of the spell by clapping him soundly upon the back with the palm of her hand. "You can thank grandma, for that! The surprise is all mine!"

Her little country protégé was as darlingly rosy as could be. Just being dumb and looking like that, Lil fancied, would go stronger with a man like Pat than any wisecrack she might let loose. Snatching up France's hat she tossed it to him.

"Let's get goin', folks," she beamed. "You an' Lorrie can get acquainted on the way over," she laughed gayly back at the still speechless Weber, whose big paw had wrapped itself around Lorrie's fingers.

It was a new roadhouse, their destination, far out in the northwest. It had a good dance floor, crowded by the time they got there. The boys had already arranged for their table.

Presently, Lil saw Lorrie melt into Weber's arms and skim away into the crowd, lost to her gaze almost in a moment. Her eyes followed the couple uneasily. She wanted to call after Lorrie and warn her not to play the game too fast, for Lorrie's small flushed face had been constantly up-turned to Weber's since they had arrived, in what looked to the anxious watcher like complete dizziness. The tender, wistful smile about the childish mouth was heart-catching in its apparent trustfulness.

But Lorrie was gone before Lil could stop her for a final word of caution, and although she and France

almost immediately followed, that was the last the concerned woman saw of her charge.

Back at the table she waited and fumed. France finally returned from his search for the couple. He brought the astonishing news that Weber's car was missing.

"Oh, France, where d'you 'spose—"

A busy waiter slid up and interrupted Lil, an almost forgotten note from Lorrie in his hand.

"Dear Lil:

"Pat is taking me for a ride, it's so hot in here. He'll take me home. Don't be mad. I'll explain how it happened, Monday.

"Lorrie."

Well, could you beat that! . . .

France's car shot onward past the bluish-white lights of Canton Hollow.

"It's too early in the spring for people to go hangin' 'round a shore," he said, referring to Weber's bungalow on the river.

"Sure!" Lil agreed bitterly. "And that's all the bigger reason for his takin' her there!"

Lil looked her years just then. Beneath the rouge her face loomed pale, her eyes drawn and weary with worry. She knew a lot, this woman, and her experience had not been all second hand. She had seen girls go on trips like this—down the river or anywhere—and life had never been the same for them again. She had seen something go with them that never came back!

"Hit her up a little more, can't you?" she begged. "Oh, how could Lorrie have been such a little fool!"

"Phew!" Weber grimaced as he was piloting Lorrie through the maze of dancers, "a jam like this makes dancing a job!"

"Would you rather we found some place——"

"Sure thing!" he laughed, looking about him.

A few feet ahead he guided her through a side door on to one of the porches. In the shadows beside one of the lighted windows he swept her hungrily into his arms. His lips unburdened themselves of a long, satisfying kiss.

The girl submitted willingly.

"Lorrie!" he breathed. "How about a little run out into the country? Spring, you know," he coaxed, "with nice woodsey odors and everything!"

"Oh, but Lil—" she quavered.

"Lil won't mind. I'll square things with France when I see him, and he'll fix it up with Lil. There might never be such another night as this. Let me get your coat, and we'll leave a note for Lil that I've taken you home. She won't worry."

And so, before Lil had even begun to look for her, the note had been written and Lorrie, her little yellow head snuggled against Weber's shoulder, the curve of his arm about her, was racing with him through the spring night.

It was a rapturously wonderful ride. For miles upon miles they scarcely spoke a word, content apparently with their nearness to each other, alone in a sleeping country whose tiny hamlets flew by on either side of them. They skirted the outer fringe of the city and presently left it behind them, the cool moist air stingingly sweet upon their faces; brilliant, companionable stars swinging slowly across the windshield before them. The few times they did address each other it could hardly be considered conversation. Pat said, once:

"I'm glad you wear your hair in that little yellow bun on the back of your neck. I like it."

And Lorrie had sighed out of a long silence:

"I think, a night like this, when everything else is growing, one's soul seems to grow, too! In the fall and winter it marks time with the rest of things, but in the spring it throws out new, exploring shoots."

Perhaps that was beyond Pat. He made no direct reply. But a little farther on he stopped the car for a brief moment. They were miles out into the nowhere.

"Your legs look beautiful in those thin, cobwebby stockings," he said, "but I'll bet they're cold. Here, let me——"

And whipping off his silk muffler he wrapped it closely and carefully about her. . . .

At last the car shot from the highlands and wooded valleys and began to drum its way along the lower ground; long, level stretches of land dotted with the occasional dim lights of silent industrial plants. The salt tang of the Chesapeake crept into their nostrils. Between a break in the trees at their right moonlight suddenly spun its slender causeway across a sheet of quiet water.

"Hadn't we better go back?" Lorrie whispered doubtfully.

"I hoped you'd let me show you my little place," Weber replied wistfully. "You'll be seeing it often, of course; but at night, especially a night like this, it has a different appeal. You'll love it."

"You don't mean to tell me you live down here?" Lorrie gasped.

"Oh, no. But I spend most of my spare time down here during the summer, or when the weather's warm enough. You've no idea how domesticated I am. Let me give you a hint, by showing you the way I've fixed things up."

"Do you entertain much?" she asked politely.

"Only the people I like best." The car had turned smartly into an opening, having traveled down a long dark tunnel of roadway beneath overreaching trees.

"This is it," Weber informed her. The moon shone starkly white upon a short, new cement walk. "Don't be afraid." Already his arms were about her, lifting her out. "I've electric lights, and I'll promise you there isn't a mouse within miles."

He eagerly unlocked the door of the little house and snapped a button.

Two rooms sprang cheerily out of the darkness beyond the threshold; gay chintz curtains at doors and windows, deep easy-chairs, a radio; through an open doorway across the room appeared a neatly made bed, a gayly patterned rug.

"Oh, why it's—it's *dear!*" Lorrie cried. "And it belongs to you?"

"Yes," Weber declared proudly, "every stick and stone of it. I bought it," he smiled gravely, "as a memorial."

"Now you're making sport of me!" she accused, pouting.

"No," Weber denied, with the same grave, serious smile. "I bought it because I was very happy here once, and I couldn't bear to see other people treating it lightly; running all over the place. It's—it's just about sacred to me!"

"What a lovely idea," Lorrie breathed, her eyes flashing misty blue at him.

"I hoped you'd think so," Weber said, sliding his arm about her. "I've never told any one else my real reason for buying it for fear of appearing ridiculous."

"But how could they possibly think that!" Lorrie exclaimed indignantly.

"Oh, but they would," Weber protested earnestly. He gave Lorrie a narrowed glance. "You see, I couldn't explain why the girl I was happy

with here should walk out on me like she did and leave me flat. Or if I had, why it was I didn't follow her and bring her back. You see, I didn't know where she was."

"But surely you could have found her had you wanted her very terribly," Lorrie said.

"I did want her very terribly," Weber insisted, his voice suddenly throaty with feeling. "But I wanted her to come back without coaxing or coercion. It would have meant so much more to me, because I loved her so dearly. Quite blindly I made a mistake and lost her; I couldn't risk perhaps another, trying to get her back."

"Yes?" Lorrie murmured, tossing her coat across a chair.

Weber's eyes rested speculatively upon the top of her head.

"It was because she was such a darling little thing," he said at length, musingly. "Nothing in the world seemed to daunt her. More as a joke than anything else I proposed that we spend a week or two down here. She almost knocked me over by agreeing, without so much as turning a hair! Took me right up. And that gave me an entirely wrong impression of her."

"Didn't you take into consideration that perhaps she loved you?" Lorrie pondered soberly. "That would make her do that. When you—you love somebody very much, Pat," she added gravely, "in a—a weak moment you're apt to lose your head!"

"I could believe all that now," Weber voiced humbly, "but at the time it never struck me that way. I put an entirely different interpretation on it. I made the mistake of thinking she was just another girl."

"And it never occurred to you that perhaps all the time she was merely trying her level best to be a good sport? I mean, trying to be the kind

of a girl she thought you liked?"

"No, it didn't. You see, I hadn't fallen in love with her; not until I got her down here. Then, it came all of a sudden. All at once I realized that she was wonderful; like no one else I had ever known. And when I did realize it, like a blundering fool I asked her to marry me."

"And couldn't understand that she was shocked because she had thought you meant to do that all the time!"

"I told you I was a blundering fool! I tried to smooth things, but she kept insisting that she had lost her self-respect!"

"Well, hadn't she, poor thing? A man thinks so—so differently from a girl," Lorrie sighed. "He'll ask anything of her and then think that for a kind word she ought to sell the old homestead out of pure gratitude!"

"I was sincere," Weber muttered. "I married her, when she let me, because I loved her; because I wanted to. I believe I could have convinced her in time, but scarcely an hour after the ceremony she left me and ran away. She said in her note that she felt she had suffered so in my eyes that it was hopeless ever to try to regain her proper place——"

"You should have followed her; made her understand!"

"Lorrie, I was afraid!" Weber said miserably. "I'm clumsy in expressing myself, and I had messed things so horribly already. I was afraid to trust myself, and I loved her so! I—I fixed up this little shack hoping that she would eventually come back of her own free will. Every month that passed I'd tell myself that next month she would come——"

"You poor old dear!"

Lorrie dabbed frantically at her eyes. Suddenly she stood on tiptoe and pulled his face down to hers.

"Now," she said brightly, releasing herself after her little tear-wet

mouth had pressed his, "show me the other room in there, and then I must be going. It's—it's frightfully late!"

"This is the same little bureau that used to be here," Weber said, as he followed her into the next room, "only prettied up."

He pulled out a top drawer, empty save for a crumpled yellow handkerchief lying on the clean paper at the bottom. A faint perfume came from it as he held it out to her.

Lorrie stole a look at his face, now that her eyes had cleared a bit. Her heart began to thump. She noted the lines about Pat's mouth; cruelly etched in lines and his fine eyes, when they encountered hers, wore a look of smouldering pain. She fell to trembling violently, aching with the desire to further comfort him.

"And these were her pyjamas," he said with a sad little chuckle, pulling out another drawer. A boyish, wistful pride crept into his voice. "She looked like a little kid in 'em!"

Lorrie took them and held them up before her.

"I'll—I'll bet *I* could wear them!" she said suddenly.

In spite of her dancing, mischievous eyes, there was still a border of tear-drops on her lashes.

Weber's arrested, keen glance, sent a surging swift tide of crimson across her face.

"Would you— Would you like to try them on?" he ventured, ever so softly.

Her little showing of color receded; the insecure, diffident smile wavered and slipped from her lips. Perhaps a dozen heartbeats marked her hesitation. Then her hand began to slide slowly up the front of her gown toward the blue shoulder-strap which held the dainty garment anchored.

Weber watched her out of the corner of his eye until he was sure that

she was in earnest, then, his lips puckered to a soundless tune, he reached slyly into the closet near him and brought forth a second pair of pyjamas—sizes larger!

There wasn't the faintest glimmer of light about the little bungalow when France and Lil reached it. But Lil's sharp eyes spied Weber's car parked close by.

Grimly she leaped out and made for the door. Her fists hammered determinedly against its panels. It took a deal of pounding before she was rewarded.

Finally the lights went on within, a shadow crossed the blind, the door was yanked open. Pat, in his bare feet, his hair tousled, loomed sleepy-eyed and scowling in the doorway.

"Where's Lorrie, you—you—"

Lil brushed suddenly past him as if, for once, her rich vocabulary had failed to yield a fitting epithet.

"*Lil!*"

Lorrie popped up in bed and flung out her arms like a delighted child.

"Oh, Lil, I'm—I'm so glad to see you!"

A queer, different Lil from any she had hitherto known came swiftly through the outer room to her. Not the cocksure, cynical, hard-boiled Lil, but a quivering-lipped, pitying woman who flung herself on the bed beside her and gathered her into her arms.

"Oh, Lorrie, kid," hot tears fell upon her cheek, "how could you be such a fool! How could you!"

"Don't be cross with me, Lil! I know I shouldn't have slipped away from you like that, and you so nice to me! But I'm all right, really I am," she insisted. "And I'm so happy—"

"Happy? *Happy?*" Lil snorted. "Oh, you make me sick! Here," she stormed, "get your clothes on and get

out of here quick. Come on, now! Beat it! Maybe we can keep this thing quiet! France 'n' I'll get you home——"

"But you don't understand, Lil. Don't you remember, I told you in my note that I'd explain Monday? I belong to Pat, and I'm not going back—ever! . . . Married to him, Lil. Almost two years ago. We—we had a quarrel and I left him. And I was too proud to come back, but I wanted to, dreadfully. That's why I came to work at the factory, so I could be near him if there'd come a chance to make up. And it was *my* Pat you picked out! Wasn't it wonderful! And I——"

"Shut up! Good grief, you make me dizzy!" Lil gasped disgustedly. "I thought you were a dumb ninny!"

She glanced wildly over her shoulder toward the outer room where France and Pat were amiably smoking a cigarette together. Her dazed eyes lingered on them for a moment, then came slowly back to the flushed little face pressed affectionately against her arm. Lorrie's eyes looked up at her like twin blue stars—happy eyes.

"The Lord give me strength not to do to you what I feel like doing, you—you little simp!" Lil breathed fervently, staring down at her. "You oughta have the tar spanked outta you!"

But her smile was tender and gentle, her eyes foolishly wet, and all the time she was speaking her mothering arms were gathering Lorrie still more closely against her plump bosom.



DIVORCED

By Jessie Crist Kelsey

The sneers I have borne,—
The years filled with scorn
Were almost worth the living
For the peace I knew
After leaving you. . . .
I can almost feel forgiving.

A DAME OF HIS OWN

By Stepan Dostev

WHAT'S bred in the bone, they say, comes out in the flesh. . . . Yeah. But how does one know what is bred in the bone? Lilies grow on dung-hills, and pygmies give birth to a giant.

Look at little Arly Hanson. He never knew his father; or, at least, of the various men who at different times lived in that noisome flat just south of the Queensboro Bridge, he had no knowledge of which was his parent. They all beat him as unmercifully; and the woman, always smelling of gin, whom he whimperingly called "Ma," was as heavy with her hand and her curses as they were.

When Arly first saw light, one stormy winter day, there was no Sutton Place and no fashionables. The river was mantled in mist and snow, and the Fall River and Providence boats, moving cautiously through Hell Gate, boomed hoarsely at frequent intervals; or, quite unable to see ahead, stopped altogether and their fog-horns rent the air.

An interne from the city hospital on Blackwell's Island (they had not yet changed its name to Welfare) came cursing out of the cold and cursed the louder to find that the prospective mother had downed a full quatern of gin and was stinking drunk. They had a fine bout of cursing; the interne, who wanted to get back to the party some of the fellows were giving with a few nurses, and Arly's mother.

She jibed obscenely at the interne, and that young man grinned nastily as she began to howl when the pains got her. He cursed again when he had to get to work, and stood up with the red baby and slapped it good and proper. It began to wail—an ugly, nasty-looking little thing, and the interne said:

"Keep it up, you little brat; I bet you'll be sorry you ever were born." . . .

Arly lived. He might just as easily have died. Sheer threats on the part of the welfare workers made his mother suckle the child. As soon as she could she weaned him and left him to lie on the floor, on an old blanket, sucking a rubber nipple. Men came in to see her, and women of her own kind. They laughed and drank and cursed and were lecherous, while the white-faced baby lay staring up at the mottled ceiling and harkened to the sirens of the river craft.

When Arly was two or three, the world outside began to stir. There were guns booming across the seas and the reverberations were beginning to be felt. He was already out on the streets, with his mother hardly keeping an eye upon him. It was left to those itinerant little mothers, the girls of the neighborhood—who always found it easier to acquire a living doll than a toy one—to minister to him. He ate what was flung at him; fried oysters, or hard steak, or a pretzel from a saloon on the corner. He drank beer more often than milk. He grew

to expect blows, and he took them shrinkingly but as part of his due.

When he was five, America entered the war. There was a good deal more of cursing going on. Men began to blossom out into silk shirts and swell shoes. Girls began to wear silk stockings, and autos even began to be parked outside the grim houses. A few figures in khaki appeared. From the west came the sounds of martial music, and now and then, up the river, came a vessel crazily painted in zigzag stripes.

Arly saw the soldiers come home. He was already selling papers. He peered—grimy, flinching, expecting to be smitten by every hand—between the legs of the onlookers and saw the soldiers marching up Fifth Avenue. A cop chased him off the Avenue. He was used to that; every one chased him. He had no fixed post to sell his papers. Every kid licked him, but he kept on the go, taking the blows that came to him, and keeping at his paper selling because that woman at home beat him worse than the others, if he failed to bring home his pocketful of pennies.

There was something about school. Arly had had to go. He didn't like it. The teachers complained that he was dirtier than even the worst of the lot. The authorities were thinking of putting him in an institution, but the woman who was his mother wanted his pennies. She went around to the saloon and the ward boss, and Arly ostensibly kept on at school and sold his papers.

Then he was fourteen and got his working papers and there was no longer any need to fear the truant officer. Fear was always present in Arly's life; fear of the bigger boys and fear of his mother and of the men who were there when he came home.

He knew everything about vice and nothing about life. Before he was ten he would stand on the fringe of

the crowd of older boys and with them call shrilly after the girls, obscene things; and as a rule the girls would give them back more than they got.

At fourteen Arly was pasty-faced, sly, versed in every sort of evil. Not so much, perhaps, from actual experience of vice, but from a first-hand knowledge of it. His black eyes blazed from his pale face, his hair straggled over his brow. He spoke the *argot* of the quarter; never raised his voice, and tried not to move his lips too much when he found need to say anything. He didn't say much. He had learned that the less one said, the less offense one gave and, therefore, the less blows one received.

He was shabby, dirty and poverty-stricken. He never had anything that was any good. If he had, either his mother took it away from him or else one of the boys did. They picked on Arly; he grew to expect it. He would have been surprised to discover any one who didn't pick on him; he would have been contemptuous. Every one picked on some one else. He took it for granted that east of First Avenue there had to be an ultimate picker-on, and *he* was elected.

Long before his mother disappeared from the scene, Arly had learned to take care of himself. There was always a hand-out from the saloon, and when, after the war, prohibition came, there were hand-outs from the speaks and errands to do. They knew him. He no longer sold papers; rather, he became a hanger-on for Big Sid Molstein's gang.

He was living by himself in the same one room then. For some time past his mother had taken various holidays on the island. Just across the way from the house it was, but she might just as well have been a hundred miles away. Arly did not go to see her. He was glad, vaguely,

that she was out of the way. When she turned up she would beat him, as usual, and take the few coins she could find on his person.

She was ill, he knew; something that kept her in the City Hospital a long time. When she came back Arly would stay away from the house. He would sleep in a corner at Molstein's place. When he learned she had gone he would come back. After the first few attempts at purchasing a few bits of furniture, he did not make the same mistake. His mother pawned them as soon as she got back. Arly was sleeping at Molstein's when he learned that the authorities were looking for him. His mother had died. Arly just stared and nodded. It was none of his business. He went around and looked suspiciously at the house. Not until Molstein told him that they had planted the old woman in Potters' field did Arly go back.

He went in and looked about suspiciously. For several days he was uneasy. He would wake and shiver, wondering if the sound he heard was the old woman coming in, and not the mice. He didn't ever quite believe that she wouldn't come back and beat him, and take away the few quarters in his pocket.

He was nineteen then. Molstein used him as errand boy, bootblack and scavenger. Until Big Sid cast his eyes on Arly and said, "Aw, hell, leave the little punk alone," his life had been torture.

They were a pretty rotten lot. There were hard-working men who lived in the neighborhood; truckmen and laborers; men who worked hard and came home tired and slept, to rise early and go to their work; honest men, dull, made more dull by the weight of their work. They read their tabloids and, perhaps, on Saturday nights they would come into Molstein's, into the bar proper, and stand

with their foot on the brass rail and drink the green beer, smoking their pipes the while and listening intently while some more voluble spirit spoke of Tammany and the tariff.

They were the sort of men who would not get over wondering, stupidly, where the old days were; the days when they got their beer for five cents the glass, and, perhaps, when they were feeling right, brought their wives into the family room behind the saloon. It had ever been their club—the saloon. They needed it. At fifteen cents the glass, and not as good, they had two or three in the evening and then went out, with a muttered word. Others, harder drinkers, stood and downed their whiskey. They came to drink. They never went into the rooms behind, where the radio and mechanical piano were, and the tables were set out on the floor and hard-eyed young boys and hard-mouthed girls sat and drank and cursed.

But Arly was as contemptuous of this class as were his betters; the men he looked up to. Those were the sleek lads who hung about Big Sid as their chief,—the men who cuffed him, and roared at his flinching,—who played practical jokes on him, and considered him so little that they would send him with messages to their women.

Arly always went avidly on these errands. There was something that appealed to his instincts about these calls. Going for Dutch, say, to that woman on Fifty-ninth Street whose husband was some sort of a checker at the express terminal—a night worker; going up the stairs, smelling of cabbage and cheap perfume; stopping outside the greasy door and tapping on it—the preconceived signal. Then going in and seeing her, either lying in bed or sitting, in her chemise, or wrapper, unabashed. A big fleshy

woman, with coarse blonde hair and pendulous breasts. A woman whose big legs filled her silk stocking and who, when she took the note that Dutch had sent, would stand up to read it, squinting, her cigarette between her lips, her wrapper fallen open, and her nudity exposed.

Dutch would have beat up any man who stole a peek at his woman's charms; but Arly didn't count. He would stand there while she spelled out the note, her lips moving, his eyes darting glances at her body. His fingers would tingle and his skin prickle. He would drop his eyes to the floor and lick his lips. She wasn't pretty,—even Arly knew that; but she was a woman. And only the men had women. All the men did, but not Arly.

He thought of it often, as he lay in his bed late at night. The room was filling up now with a collection of things. Things he had prigged, or that Big Sid had let him take, as no one else wanted them. There was a pair of old red curtains; a big sideboard that had cost Arly six bits to have it moved in; plates and china. There was a rug that was too conspicuous for the fence. They didn't want to try and sell it.

Arly was proud of his place; it was his own. He paid the rent, and he would always return to it, no matter how late it might be when Big Sid said, "Gwan now, beat it," and went out to the car; or else, the woman of the evening would be standing in the door of Sid's office, looking at him impatiently. Then Sid would grin at Arly and turn towards her with a "Don't get hot, honey; I'm comin'."

Women and money! That's what they all had, and what Arly envied them. He picked up quite a bit of money, and there was no mother now to take it from him. He was twenty. Some one had told him there were

banks. He wasn't sure they were safe; but after some prowler had found his cache under the loose plank in the floor, Arly began to put his money in the bank at the corner.

He had quite a bit. He didn't spend any; certainly not on his clothes. They were the cast-off garments of Big Sid, or Ike Lifton, or Snide McCarty. They either fitted him or they didn't; he wasn't particular, as long as he was clothed. His face usually lacked a washing. He sometimes took a bath, when the comments on the odor of his presence were emphasized with kicks and blows.

He got tips, often, from the women he carried messages to, though he would have been glad to do it for nothing. He liked being around women; liked the odor of their flesh, strong and appealing. He often went to the burlesque houses and applauded vigorously when the teasers came out to do their stuff.

He would leer after girls on the street and call things after them, if he did not know them. The women that consorted with the men of the gang were contemptuous of him, and he did not take liberties with them.

There were often parties in the rooms at the rear of the speak. Big Sid had a wife—a dark little Jewess who lived with her children somewhere uptown, and Sid went home to her; but he sported with women at the speak. The other men had their women; no man was worth his salt who didn't. They would drink and make love in the rooms late at night. Arly would come in to bring fresh glasses and bottles, to clear away.

He would see how the women hung upon their men, how the men contemptuously accepted their caresses; see two women fight and the men egging them on. No man, Arly was certain, was worth his salt unless he had a woman.

But it was not all play with Big Sid's gang. Sometimes there was work to do; a little strong-arm stuff. Sid was a power in the district. Then it was that Dutch or Eddie or Snide came in. They were handy with a blackjack when rod-work was out. A nice little beating-up party to intimidate some recalcitrant loft-owner, or wholesaler.

They were all well-dressed, all easy with their money. Easy come, easy go. Blondes and cars, and better liquor than they sold. Throwing a quarter or a half to Arly. Sometimes his pockets were pretty well filled. The teller at the bank on the corner, the little branch bank, looked at him queerly when he came in at times. Once he said:

"Why don't you take a bath and get a decent suit of clothes? You can afford it." Arly just grinned at him. The teller shook his head:

"You're a queer kid. What are you going to do with all your money? You never draw out a cent."

"I dunno," Arly told him blankly.

The teller shook his head again and stared after Arly as he went out.

Time went on and the gang grew more powerful. There were strong political ties between Big Sid and some of the bosses. He had other places. He shifted around and when there were messages to be taken, Arly took them. He still got no pay; just what was thrown to him. A dollar to buy something, and "Keep the change, punk." Or he would forget to mention the change and it would not be asked for. The balance grew. Other customers at the bank might eye him askance, but the tellers did not.

He was twenty-three when he met Ellen Fuller. She worked in the Coffee-Pot around the corner from Big Sid's, and Arly, often eating his frugal coffee and sinkers there in the morning, noticed her. A dark little

thing; scrawny, with great eyes and a pathetic little face; not more than seventeen. Arly stared at her and was prepared to drop his eyes when she dropped hers first. It startled him, and then made him feel proud. Gee, a dame that was scared of him! When she disappeared around the counter he said to the Greek, Giana-poulos:

"Where'd you git that, Gippy?"

"Hoh? You mean dis girl?"

"Yeh, th' queen."

The Greek laughed, showing his teeth:

"Some queen, hey? I bet the boys at Big Sid's they go for her, hey?"

Arly nodded, grinning back:

"Looks like a rat, if you ast me. Where'd she come from?"

The Greek shrugged. "My cousin he send her roun'. From de agency. She's work hard an' no cost much."

"Where's she come from, though?"

Arly asked. "Where's she live?"

The Greek shrugged. "I no ast questions. She sleep in de back."

When she came back, Arly stared hard at her, and she dropped her eyes, frightened.

"What's your name, kid?" he demanded, in the best imitation of Dutch Muller's manner.

"Ellen," she gasped. "Ellen Fuller."

"Oh, yeah?" Which was how Snide said it. Arly stuck a toothpick in his mouth, twirled it. "Workin' for the Greek, hey? Where ya hail from?"

Her thin mouth set stubbornly. She shook her head. Her face was frightened. Arly said suddenly:

"Sall right kid. Don't you worry. If anybody's after ya, lemme know. I'm wit' Big Sid, an' the cops knows us. Ya don' hafta be scared." He nodded graciously and went out, conscious of a little glow of pride in his chest. He told a dame what was what; a dame that was scared of him.

It was a new idea to Arly. It grew

on him. He took a longer time of mornings over his "coffee and—." He would ply her with questions and she would stand, her eyes downcast, a drab, skinny thing, taking all he had to give.

Big Sid went to Philly one afternoon. Arly, carrying his bag out to the car, said:

"Annythin' you want done while you're away, Boss?"

Sid, round-faced, flabby, genial, yet with sharp dark eyes, looked at him:

"Say, you're a worker, Arly. How long you been wit' me?"

Arly grinned warily. "Gee, I dunno, Boss."

Sid shook his head. "A long time." He chuckled. "We come on some, hey, kid?"

Arly glowed. "You bet. They can't hold you, Boss."

"You said it, kid." He thrust a cigar at Arly. "Here, gas yourself, Arly. An' take a day off. I'll be back tomorrer." He reached in his pocket and brought out a bill. "Take your girl out for a good time." His brow crinkled as his grin spread: "Say, you ain't got a girl, have ya, Arly?"

Arly grinned back. "I c'n get one. They's one I know."

Big Sid roared with laughter:

"I'll bet she's *some* doll. S'long."

Arly stood looking after the big car. He did not go back into the speak. They would find work for him, Big Sid to the contrary. He grinned to himself, thrust out his little chest and went up the familiar street.

It was quiet in the Greek's. Ellen was sitting in her usual corner. She came timidly forward:

"Coffee, Mr. Arly?"

He stared at her, glorying in the way her eyes dropped.

"Nah. I'm on me way home. Say, lissen; what time you get off?"

Her great eyes widened. "Me? I dunno. When we close."

"Oh, yeah?" He gestured in Eddie's manner. "Well, t'night you're gettin' off at eight. I'm takin' ya to the movies."

Her eyes glowed, then the light in them died:

"He won't let me go."

Arly scowled. "Say, forgit it. I'll be callin' for ya at eight."

He was as good as his word. He had washed the front of his face; dampened his hair. Ellen was in her corner and the Greek at the counter:

"Ho, Mr. Arly."

"Ho, yourself," Arly grunted. "I come to take the kid to th' movies."

The Greek goggled. "Who?" Dat one?" He gestured.

"Yeh. Got 'ny objections?"

The Greek beamed. "No, no! Sho." He showed his teeth; "Pret' skinny, that one. Me, I'm like them fat. Hey?" He bellowed, "You, Ellen! You hear Mr. Arly? Get you hat." He moved his head closer to Arly: "You tell Big Sid I'm good feller?"

"You're all ri'," Arly told him. His heart was pounding. The Greek was deferring to him!

He strutted by the girl's side up the street. Mouselike, she walked with him towards where the blaze of light from Proctor's was. He paid his dollar for the tickets and went up with her to the loges. He lighted his cigarette and, while his eyes were on the screen, he was conscious all the while that he, Arly, was out with a girl! A girl that was as scared of him as any bum that the gang brought into the back room.

When they came out he took her across the street to Pietro's and bought her spaghetti. He was amazed at the way she ate. "Say, you gotta appetite for a small piece o' girl. Wouldn't think you woiked in a lunch-room."

Her eyes rose from her plate:

"He don' give me much."

"Oh, yeah?" Arly stared at her. "Say, lissen; jus' say th' woid an' I'll give that Greek somepin' to think about."

Her great eyes widened. "N-no. It would make it worse for me."

He considered. "Well, I could, ya know."

"Sure; I know. You're with Big Sid."

"I'll say!" Arly was gratified. Outside, he said: "You ain't goin' back until I say, see?"

She nodded, walking close to his side. His heart was almost in his mouth, but he said, carelessly:

"You're comin' up to my dump."

She followed him into the house and up the stairs. Arly threw open the door:

"There! This is my place."

He lighted the gas, and Ellen looked around.

"Gee, it's swell," she said. Her eyes turned to him: "You live here, all alone?"

"Yeh; all by my lonesome. Ain't got no folks. Folks is no good."

"Me neither," Ellen said swiftly. "I never did have any."

"Never?"

"No. I—I run away, from th' orphanage." She trembled. "They'd take me back if they found me. You wouldn't let them, would you, Mr. Arly?"

Arly's chest swelled. "Nah, I wouldn't let them. I'll take care o' you, baby. Leave it ta me."

They sat there in the mustiness of the room, with its clutter of furniture. Arly could hardly realize it; here he was, in his own place, and with a dame!

He didn't know how to go about it. All the rags and tags of memory came to him. The way Dutch treated them; the phrases Eddie uttered. He got up

and went over to her and pulled her hat off. Her abundant hair was long and black. Her great eyes looked up at him. He said:

"I'll take care o' you, baby."

Her small hand crept into his. It was warm and confiding. Arly looked down at her. Then he put out his hand and pushed her head.

"You'll do what I tell you, see?"

"Yes," she gasped.

He stood off, looking at her. His heart was pounding:

"Come here, then, an' kiss me."

She came slowly to him, stopped and looked at him. He did not move. He couldn't; he was trembling. She raised on tiptoe and pressed her lips to his cheek. He put his arms around her, fumblingly. Her face was close to his. He kissed her on the mouth. Her lips were warm, yielding. Her thin body was soft. She nestled against him.

He held her to him, kissing her. He found courage to sink down in the chair and take her in his lap. She lay against him, her face tilting up each time his head bent to hers. He said:

"You're stayin' here wit' me to-night, baby."

She sighed, nestling to him. "I—I like it here, Mr. Arly. It's swell."

"Yeah, it's swell." He pushed her to her feet. She looked at him, timidly. "Go 'n get t' bed," he said.

She looked around. "C'n—c'n I wash, Mr. Arly?"

"Wash?" He stared at her. "Sure." He went over and opened the door of the bathroom. The gas-jet was broken. He lighted a candle stump. The basin and tub were grimy with dust. There was an old gas geyser. He put his head out. "You want hot water?"

Her eyes shone: "C'n I have it?"

"Sure," he said vaguely and lighted the coil. It hadn't been used in years. The gas hissed and glowed blue. The flanges of the coil grew red. He

lighted another candle, and then two more. The room was softly bright now. He came out: "You c'n turn on th' water."

Shyly she passed him, went into the bathroom. Arly sat down by the window. Gee, he was a man now! But he was scared; he'd never had a dame before. And here he was, in his own joint, with a woman! A skinny kid, but she was his—all his own. Like the rooms he lived in.

He sat there smoking. He heard the splash of the water, heard it stop, and then the intimate sounds of Ellen bathing herself. He shivered, his stomach quaking.

She came out, wearing that old bathrobe that Big Sid had given him and that Arly had never worn. The sleeves were rolled up, and the skirts trailed. Her hair was in a mass over her shoulders and she was rubbing it with the towel. He stared at her. She shook her head and flounced the waves of hair with her hand.

"It'll take some time to dry," she told him. Her cheeks were flushed. "Gee, that was swell! I been dyin' for a real bath." She looked shyly at him. "I lef' the light on. There's lots o' water; I turned it on for you."

"F' me?" He stared at her in amaze. Then he nodded: "Okay. I guess I c'n use a bath too, hey?" He went over to the chest of drawers and found some of the pyjamas that had come his way. He was doin' it jus' like Dutch and Moe. They had silk pyjamas,—which was why these linen ones had come his way. He turned and looked at Ellen. She was drying her hair, her head bent. He could see, through the slack of the robe, the white of her young body. It was not flabby, like Dutch's woman's; nor mottled like the bodies of the dames that giggled in the back room when their clothes were taken away from them. He averted his eyes and went

into the bathroom and looked sidewise at the steaming water.

He felt funny when he came out. His body glowed. The pyjamas were cool against his skin. His face, too, was unseemly smooth, for he had decided that if he were to bathe, he might as well shave. That's what the gang did.

Ellen got up. Her hair was all fluffed out now, and the gaslight made little lights dance in it. She laughed at him, softly.

"Your hair's all crazy," she said, and she came to him, the broken-toothed comb in her hand. Arly stood there while she combed his hair and parted it, standing back to get the effect. She said: "You smell so nice, Mr. Arly!"

Arly gulped. "Can the 'mister.' It's Arly t' you."

She blushed, actually. Her dark lashes swept down and then up:

"Arly!"

They stood there. He said, moistening his lips with his tongue:

"Ya tired?"

"Some," she answered.

He went over and turned out the light. From the street came the faint reflection of the lamp on the corner. He saw her dim presence before him and he reached out. She came to him. Her body was cool and soft. He put his arms about her and held her close. He could feel the pound of her heart.

"Gonna stay wit' me?"

His face was in her hair. It smelled strangely sweet. He heard her muffled voice, humbly, say:

"If you'll let me, Arly." Her arms tightened suddenly. Her lips parted as his mouth rested on them. She breathed quickly. He felt a sudden rush of blood about his heart, pounding. His eyes closed and he pressed her to him. Then, instinctively, he lifted her in his arms. She clung to him.

"Gee," he said, "you don' weigh nothin'!"

She did not answer. Her hands caught his face and her mouth closed on his. He went stumblingly down the room with his burden.

Ellen was still asleep when Arly left the next morning. He stood looking down at her. She lay like a child, her arm upflung over her head, her hair lying in masses on the pillow. Her skin was pale and translucent, and there were the faintest of shadows under her eyes and about the roots of her lashes. He caught his breath. Gee, she was pretty! He tiptoed out of the room, and then came back to leave a little pile of silver on the table and a scrawled, misspelled note: "*Get some grub. Arly.*"

He stopped by at the Greek's. Gippy grinned toothsomely at him:

"Wan you gon send her back, hey? She's all right, hey?"

Arly scowled at him. "She ain't comin' back, see? I'm keepin' her. You got 'ny thing t' say?"

The Greek smiled placatingly:

"Sho. No, no! 'S all ri' with me."

"Okay," Arly growled and went out of the shop. At the speak he looked in. The office was empty, but there were things to do. He tidied up; paid no attention to the jibes that greeted him. Dutch said:

"Say, punk, take this note over to Stella." He stared at Arly: "What you been doin'? Washin'?" He laughed. "Say, guys, give a look! Th' punk's gettin' flossy. He mus' have a dame."

Arly slipped out, avoiding a cuff, and went up the street; up the stairs to that apartment, knocked and went in. The big, blowzy blonde was manicuring her nails. She wore black chiffon panties and nothing else. She looked at him and took the note. Her mascaro'd eyes widened:

"Say, you look different." Her lips pursed. "You ain't bad lookin'. How old are ya, honey?"

"Twenny-three," Arly said.

"Yeah? Y' look younger." She became suddenly aware of her bare bosom. "Gee, what'll you think o' me, goin' round like this."

Arly said: "Any answer?"

She threw down the note.

"It c'n wait." She came to him: "Say, I'm lonely. Let's have a drink, you'n me, honey."

Her scent was strong, and her bosom shook as she walked. She put out her hand and touched his cheek. Arly thought of Ellen, and felt a sudden distaste for the big, flabby woman before him. He backed to the door:

"I gotta be goin'."

"I won't hurt you, honey." She grinned at him. "Let mama pet you."

Arly scowled. "Dutch is waitin'," he told her.

"Ah, t' ell wit' him."

"Okay," Arly told her. "I gotta go. What I tell him?"

She stared at him and then picked up the note; read it.

"Tell him okay." She came towards him: "Maybe you c'n come back, huh?"

"Maybe." Arly grinned and went out.

He ran down the stairs. Gee, the big blonde wanted to make him! What a chance—that big floosey! After a sweet little dame like Ellen. His chest thrust out. He stopped off at the speak long enough to yell to Dutch that it was okay and then went on towards his own place.

He went quietly up the stairs and opened the door. It smelled strangely clean. The windows were open. Ellen, a towel around her hair, was tidying. She came to him as he looked around:

"I got a lot o' work t' do, Arly." She looked at her hands, smiled timidly:

"But I can't kiss you; I'm all dirty."

"Yeh," said Arly vaguely. His eyes kept going to her face. Gee, he had been right,—she was pretty; but skinny,—and those rags she wore! He said: "Say, when'll you be done?"

"Why?"

"Don't ask me why," he said.

"In—in a hour?"

"Okay; I'll be back."

He went out and across the street and towards First Avenue. He went into the bank and found his friend the teller:

"Say, I want a few bucks."

"Sure. Gonna buy yourself some real things at last?"

"Yeh." Arly smiled to himself.

The teller pushed him a slip. Arly said:

"I don' know how t' fix them things. You do it, huh?"

"All right. How much?"

"Fifty."

Arly set his mouth, signed the chit and passed in his book. He came out, with his chest expanded, the money warm in his pocket.

She was waiting.

"Come on," he said. He led her up to Fifty-ninth Street and across to First, and then down toward Second and over to Third. He took the money out of his pocket. Thrust it into her hand: "Here; 'at's fifty bucks. Get some clo'es."

Ellen gasped. "Me?"

"Yeah." He thrust out his jaw at her. "Go ahead. Want me ta slap ya down?"

Her eyes held his. "What—what'll I get?"

"Whaddya think? Get yaself some clo'es; stockin's—silk ones; shoes. You know. G'wan now." He pushed her away from him and went quickly towards home.

He scowled at her when she came back, some two hours later, her arms full of bundles.

"I been waitin' for you," he growled. "Time for chow."

She dropped her packages and ran to him:

"Don't let's go out, Arly. I got us a swell steak."

Arly laughed scornfully: "I bet you're a lousy cook."

"I ain't." Her eyes flashed at him. "I c'n cook good."

He pushed her with his open hand:

"Don't give me any lip."

Her mouth trembled. She put out her hand and touched his arm:

"Honest, Arly. Try me. Huh?"

Gee, beggin' him! Arly turned away that she should not see his face:

"Aw' right. Go ahead."

He sat in his chair and smoked. The smell of the cooking on the range; the sight of Ellen, in an apron that went all over her, moving about, setting the table, stealing a glance at him, and smiling tentatively at him. It made him feel suddenly strange. He scowled at her and, when she called, went to the table. Anxiously, she watched him. Cabbage, young and green; little new potatoes; thick steak and onions. Arly ate avidly. He looked up to find her eyes on him.

"Is it—is it good, Arly?"

"Yeh," he said, "it's swell. You c'n cook." He pushed back from the table and sighed.

Ellen jumped up. "Wait!" She went into the kitchen and came back with the pie. "You try this. I'll get the coffee."

Later Arly got up and went to sit by the window. He tried to scowl at her, to be hard:

"I'm so full I can't breathe."

Ellen smiled. He saw with fascinated eyes that there was a dimple at the right of her chin.

"I ate a lot too." Her eyes grew anxious. "Arly?"

"Yeh."

"I—I spent a lot."

"All of it?"

"N-no; most forty dollars." Her voice was low.

He scowled at her. "Didn't I tell ya t' spend it all? What'd ya get?"

She fluttered. "Wait; I'll show you."

As he sat and smoked, she came out, showing him each piece. The flowered dress, the silk stockings, the patent pumps.

"Well, put some of 'em on," Arly growled. "They ain't for no museum. Did ya get—get pants an' things too? Silk ones?"

She nodded, tremulous. Arly gestured:

"Get some on; let's see what I'm payin' for."

She came out, her young body lithe and unashamed in her proud possessions. Arly nodded:

"Pretty swell. You'll do."

Ellen flew across the room. She nestled in his lap and wound her arms about his neck:

"You do want me, Arly, don't you?"

"Sure. You're all right."

"An' I'm goin' to stay here with you, always?"

"Yeh." He shoved her from his lap. "Get a dress on; we'll do a movie,—unless I ain't pretty enough fer ya."

She frowned at him. "You oughta have a real suit, now I got all these things."

"Oh, yeah?" He caught her by the arm. "You givin' me lip?"

Her great eyes filled. "No, Arly; on'y I want you to look swell too. You—you're good-lookin'."

Arly was taken back. "Me?" He laughed and shoved her away. "Get ready." He caught her glance, grunted: "Aw right; I'll get me a suit."

"An' I can go with you?"

"Yeh, you c'n go."

She came to him, hesitant:

"Arly?"

"What?"

"Let's not go out, huh? Let's—let's stay in." Her arms went convulsively around him. Her face pressed to his breast. . . .

And so they settled down. Every one noticed the way Arly blossomed out. All the gang chaffed him, but Big Sid looked pleased. He sent Arly on other errands now; up to offices where he took verbal messages.

"You c'n keep your mouth shut, hey, Arly?" Big Sid demanded.

"Yeh, I c'n."

"You don' know nuthin', see? You never met any o' these people I send ya t' see? Right?"

"Right."

Even to taking wads of the green, and leaving the jack with men who gave him bits of paper that fitted other bits. Once in the speak a man standing with Big Sid, slightly edged, said:

"Say, how are you, kid?"

Arly stared at him.

The man said: "You know me. Why, you came up to my office yesterday, didn't you?"

Arly shook his head, blankly:

"Wasn't me, mister. I ain't never met you. No, sir!" He went calmly on with his work. Big Sid's cigar shifted in his mouth while the man said:

"I'll be damned! I was sure that was the kid."

Sid said: "Have another." But his eyes went across the room to where Arly was working, and they shone with approval.

Before two months were up, Arly was confronted with the fact that he had been right about Ellen; she was pretty. She had filled out; her face was a creamy oval and her great eyes were lustrous. He never brought her to the speak—not with the gang there. He was afraid. They would make up to her, and what chance had he

against such fiah guys as Dutch and Moe and Eddie? He kept her away.

But he couldn't always. Annually, Big Sid gave an autumn blow-out for the neighborhood, a dance and entertainment, with beer and sandwiches. He spoke to Arly:

"Want you t' come t' th' party, Arly. Bring your girl. You got one?"

"Yeh," Arly said, "I have; but——"

"Well, bring her."

An order from the boss was an order. The big night came. Ellen was all a-flutter. She hung on his arm, excited, as they came to the hall.

Arly was afraid. He had only to look at Ellen to know that all the gang would mark her; and with him. Arly, the butt.

Dutch was the first to note him. He came dancing down the room, staring at Ellen. He saw Arly and his jaw dropped. The big blonde said:

"Come on an' dance. What you starin' at?"

Dutch glared at her, "Shut up, you!" He walked over to Ellen and said: "You wit' him—wit' Arly?"

"Yes, sir," she said proudly.

Dutch grinned. "I'll be steppin' wid ya." He cuffed Arly's head: "Thanks for findin' her, punk." Then danced away.

Arly said nothing. He and Ellen danced. She wasn't good at it,—neither was he; but the music and the light and the crowd filled her with excitement. They sat down and drank beer and ate sandwiches. Big Sid, coming by with a couple of aldermen, called to Arly. He came back to Ellen, his face downcast:

"I gotta go somewhere for the chief. You stay here?"

Her eyes smiled into his:

"I won't move, Arly. Don't be long."

"I won't," he promised and flew out of the hall; he even took a cab

on the errand. When he came back he was panting as he ran up the stairs. The dance was in full force. Big Sid, Eddie told him, was gone over to the office. He noted Arly's glances. Ellen was not where he had left her.

"Lookin' for that little bit o' jail bait you brought?" Eddie asked.

Arly looked at him, agony in his eyes:

"Yeh. Where is she?"

Eddie shrugged. "Dutch was dancin' with her. The blonde's ravin'. Guess Dutch took your dame over to the joint to see what she's made of."

He laughed and Arly turned and ran from the hall, up the street and down into the speak. The bar was full. Big Sid was there. Arly did not give him a glance, although the boss made him a sign. He dashed into the back room. That was full, but there were no signs of Ellen. Then he made his way down the passage to the inner rooms,—the private hang-out of the gang.

In its tawdry red-and-gold confines he saw Dutch and Ellen. Dutch leaning over her. Arly's heart went sick within him. That was that.

He was about to turn away and go out, when he heard Ellen call to him. She came stumbling across the room, her flowered gown torn at the shoulder:

"Arly, don't let him touch me. You won't, will you, Arly?"

She clung to him, trembling. Arly turned and stared at Dutch. The big, red-faced bruiser grinned:

"Beat it, punk, beat it."

Arly's jaw jutted; a prickle went up his spine. He pushed Ellen aside.

"This is my dame," he said slowly.

Dutch guffawed. "Your dame? Hell, you ain't got nuthin', see? Beat it or I'll smear ya."

Arly was aware that the door had opened. Eddie came in and Moe.

"Look out," Dutch said; "I'm gonna sock the punk through the door."

Eddie grinned tolerantly. Moe's dark little eyes shone. Arly's mouth set. He turned suddenly to Moe:

"Gimme your knife."

Moe stared at him, surprised. Then his hand slipped inside his coat and the thin, bright blade glittered as he passed it to Arly. Ellen was gasping against the wall. Dutch stared at Arly; he cursed.

"Why, you little rat!" He came rushing forward.

But not for nothing had Arly learned to avoid blows and kicks. Once let Dutch get his hands on him and he was done. Quick as a gleam of light he darted aside. His arm swooped. The sleeve of Dutch's coat flapped, slit open. Dutch roared. Arly spun, his feet dancing. Again his arm swooped. Dutch staggered back, clutching his arms. Bright red blood dripped between his fingers. His mouth was open. Fear glazed his eyes. He yelled at the others:

"I ain't got no gat. He'll do me in!"

Arly's breath came in snarling gasps:

"You're damn right I will."

"Keep him off!" Dutch bleated. "Keep him off! For God sake."

Slowly Arly made his way forward. He had gone berserk. He did not hear Big Sid come in. He only heard:

"Hold it, Arly!"

His hand dropped. The light died from his eyes. He stood there, trembling, and Ellen ran to him and clung against him. Big Sid said:

"You guys beat it. Gwan, Eddie, Moe. Dutch, see about that arm. I'll speak to you later."

He stared at the two of them when they were alone:

"Care a lot for that kid, hey, Arly?"

Arly's jaw set. "She's my dame, Boss."

The dark eyes rested on Ellen's face, keenly. He nodded.

"You look like a good kid." He looked at Arly: "Gonna just give her the run around? Or is it for good?"

Arly looked at Ellen. He felt a sudden pounding of blood in his head:

"For good, Boss; don't want no other dame, never."

He scowled at Ellen as she uttered a little cry.

Big Sid smiled. "That's swell!" He came over and put his hand on Arly's shoulder: "You're a good kid, Arly. You got guts an' a close mouth. They're pushin' me up; I'm gonna be a alderman." He grinned. "It don' mean nothin', 'cept that I'm gettin' big. I'll need you with me. Those other punks," he jerked his head, "we won't need them around—uptown."

"Gee, Boss!" Arly said.

Big Sid shoved a cigar at him:

"If your girl'll let you smoke." He smiled at Ellen. "You two're comin' up to meet the missus after. See? I'll bet you she makes you get married from our house." He grinned proudly: "I know my ol' woman. She'll like you kids." He turned to the door: "I'll send some one for ya when it's time ta go uptown."

Alone, Arly drew a deep breath. He turned and saw Ellen looking at him with lustrous great eyes.

"Ya hear the Boss? Y'gonna be married to me."

Ellen's lips trembled. "Yes, Arly. It—it's all right with you?"

He stared at her, scowling:

"All right? Sure it is! Ain't you my dame? Ain't I battled for ya? Sure it's all right!" He jerked his head; "C'mere an' kiss me, broad."

"A YOUNG MAN MARRIED—"

By Oliver Scott

SUCCESS is a marvelous thing, and Jap Devon found it sweet. . . . It wasn't for nothing that Jasper Brown, just out of Yale, and doing no more with his education than tootin' a mean sax in an obscure band, and crooning love-songs, had changed his name to Jap Devon, as the nice lady who juggled with numbers advised him.

Jap, who was blessed with a sense of humor, chuckled when he thought of it. Why, all the long line of Browns who had gone before him would turn in their graves if they knew the last of the Browns—that is, of their particular line of Browns—had changed his name.

But Jap should worry; wasn't he the bright particular star of all the lovely ladies in the land? Wasn't "Devon's Band of Musical Hounds" outstanding? Wasn't Jap himself a charmer? Couldn't he step out before an audience—any audience—raise a baton, flash a smile, and get them going? You bet! . . .

The contracts they thrust before him, calling for more money than Jap thought in the world—that is, outside the house of Mellon, Rockefeller, and in the hands of Henry Ford. Those contracts handed Jap a smile; there was a no-marriage clause in them. Just like a Hollywood queen, he thought; and as though I would, when femmes, all types of femmes, are to be had for a smile. He quite agreed that a young man married is a young man marred. Yes, indeed!

Jap Devon was a tall, slender lad, with curly black hair, the brightest of blue eyes, a gentle mouth, flashing white teeth, and when he smiled—oh, that smile! It was such an intimate, tender smile, that each and every woman, be she maid, wife, or the other thing, felt it was flashed for her alone. Although Jap, being amazingly unconscious of his own charming personality, gave Lady Luck all the credit for his overwhelming success, he was wrong; it was due to that winning smile of his.

Jap didn't have a thing to worry him; money was rolling in and in a few months Europe was calling, all lined up with more fat contracts; and then, suddenly, he found life full of worries. He didn't know why, but there it was!

So, because he found his hands shaking, his eyes playing queer tricks with him, his temper rasped, and with a nasty cough, left over from his last cold, he went to see his doctor. The doctor, a very distinguished member of his profession, who had seen Jap through a siege of pneumonia, looked him over. When the doctor raised his eyes they were serious.

"Too much wine, women and song," he said tersely.

Jap stiffened; he considered himself a most moral young man; moral, that is, within limits.

"Ah, doc!" he said plaintively.

The doctor smiled at him:

"Too much bright lights, too much drinking, too much pretty ladies, and

much too little sleep, is what I meant," he said. "And don't call me doc. Draper's my name, and if that's too hard, call me professor; I am, you know."

Jap flashed that famous smile of his:

"And then—what's the prescription, Professor? And don't make it too hard; I'm human."

"Rest, quiet, long hours of sleep. Lay off the girls, or——"

"Or—?" Jap asked, his voice tense.

"You'll go into a decline."

Jap laughed. "Like a lovely lady in love! Eh, Professor?"

"Just that!"

"But, Prof, there are contracts, all signed by yours truly."

"And there's death too!"

"And after the contracts here, there's Europe," Jap said thoughtfully.

"Young man, you can't have your cake and eat it!" the doctor told him. "When are those European contracts?"

"They're for July, and through the winter. London, Paris, Berlin! Lovely contracts for much gelt, Professor darling."

"All right. You've most of April, there's May, and June. Get into the country, go fishing, live outdoors, and in July you'll be fit."

"Well, you're the doctor," Jap said. "Although I hate like hell to give up now, if you say it's so, that I've got to go, well, I'll try it out. I've always wanted to go to Banff. Lake Louise is a honey, they say."

"Nothing like that, Jap," the doctor said firmly. "I'm going to send you to a place I go when my nerves start playing tricks on me. A quiet place where there's fishing and nothing much else to do. You'll live out of doors and get well. It's that, lad, or perhaps you prefer a short life and a merry one."

"Bad as that?" Jap questioned.

"Just as bad as that!" the doctor told him gravely....

When he left the doctor, he went to see the lady of the moment. A lovely lady, some three years older than Jap, with a million in her own right, a family tree, and her name graced the *Register*. But don't think that Jap had hurt her any; she had been playing with playboys long before Jap crossed her path.

He told her what the doctor had said; then:

"Perhaps you'd like to come along, Mary."

He was startled when she laughed and threw herself on his breast: "You're sweet, Jap, and I adore you! But have you any idea why I play around?" She didn't wait for a answer: "I play around because I'm bored stiff. I like the bright lights, I like to drink—and I'm crazy about you. But the country, and early to bed—even with you, beautiful—isn't in my line."

"No hard feelings," Jap told her, feeling curiously relieved. He couldn't quite see the adorable Mary in the country. "I thought you might think it up to me to ask."

Mary laughed at that. "But, Jap, we'll do Europe together! July isn't so far away."

Jap wasn't any too enthusiastic. July was still three months away, and there's a whole lot of water goes under the bridge in three months, he thought, but was careful not to mention it....

Elmfield was a pretty place,—even Jap acknowledged that; but he found it just as deadly quiet as he had expected and as the doctor had warned him. There were hills, now dressed in the delicate green of early spring, with placid trout streams. There was a tiny town with white houses and tree-bordered streets, nestling in the foothills. There were cold, quiet

nights and warm sunshiny days. But to Jap the quiet was more appalling than jazz bands—and how he longed for the toot of a saxophone. He fished, he read all the very light literature he could get his hands on, when he got back from his long tramps over the hills. Jap was taking his cure seriously. Then, one day, he went to town and discovered the Carnegie Library, such as one finds in most small towns. But this one happened to be different, for it was presided over by Margaret Vale. When Jap saw her he flashed that winning smile of his and there wasn't much left for Meg to do, but the thing she did; the thing that more sophisticated women had done before her—the thing they would go on doing. She fell in love with him, desperately, then and there.

You couldn't blame her really. Meg, of course, had seen men, a whole lot of all kind of men, but none like Jap Devon. Jap was different, you know. His smile made her tremble, made her heart beat fast. And Jap, having nothing better to do, smiled his sweetest, and life, with a pretty girl to the fore, took on a new zest. For Margaret Vale was a lovely girl; a really lovely girl, with honey-colored hair, gray eyes and a sweet mouth. Her skin was a lovely magnolia-white, and Jap liked to smile at her to see her cheeks flood with rich color. She wore neat little dresses with white collars and cuffs, and Jap thought she was adorable.

But what she thought of him was something else again. Like all girls she had dreamed, but unlike most girls her dreams had come true, for here was a fairy prince come to life!

Although Meg looked about seventeen, she was really all of twenty-two, and she knew a thing or two. Not for nothing had she presided over a library that boasted a few of the lat-

est best sellers, and most of the old ones. She knew something about life—and a whole lot about flaming youth. So the first night when they went walking out into the quiet of the countryside, and he took her in his arms and kissed her, although her heart was doing queer things, she didn't draw back. In fact, she was as eager as he was and gave back kiss for kiss.

And she was thinking strange things; "I'll love him all my life!"... "There's no one like him!"... "Nothing else matters!"... And then she wondered if he'd come to care enough for her to marry her. Even that didn't seem to matter, as long as he only loved her... Of course, she didn't tell him these things.

It got so that every afternoon he would sit in the cool shadowy library, his head bent over a book, reading. She loved to see him there; loved to see him raise his dark head and flash her one of those haunting smiles of his. Night after night they walked along country lanes, or sat under a tree, staring up at the stars.

It was all very charming, idyllic, but don't think that Jap wasn't very often homesick for the lights and the music of a jazz band, for a snort or two; but, nevertheless, he found Meg oddly satisfying in her adoration. He wouldn't have hurt her for anything, and he always had felt that seduction wasn't in his line. If you had asked him if he were in love with her, he'd have laughed; but he did like Meggsie. She was so lovely to look at; so restful. He even found her naïveté refreshing.

Meg was happy, but she was sad too! May was coming to a close, June would soon pass and, with its passing, Jap would be gone. She visioned his leaving, going away forever; life slipping away from her too! All that would be left was long

days in the shadowy library, his face, his smile forever at her heart. She'd grow old and gray and be forgotten, there with her books.

So one night, they sat close under the stars, she said:

"I have a two-weeks vacation, starting next week, Jap."

"Gee, wouldn't it be great if we could spend it somewhere together?" he said, without meaning a word of it. Naturally, he almost fell over when Meg said, her voice husky with emotion:

"And why can't we? You're always talking about Lake Louise, why can't we go there together?"

Jap looked troubled—he was troubled.

"Oh, he said, "but we couldn't do that. People would talk!"

"Who cares?" she said. "Besides, how'd they know? We could be careful."

"But, baby," he told her anxiously, "it wouldn't be right; a kid like you and an old timer like me! You see, sweet, I can't marry you—I can't marry any one; I'm tied up with contracts that have a no-marriage clause,—just like a movie queen. You can laugh—I did, but it's true! There's another thing too, darling; I——" He stopped. You can't very well tell a girl who is crazy about you that you don't want to marry her, can you?

Meg was sitting close to him, when she spoke her voice sounded far away:

"Who said anything about marriage?"

"Oh," he looked at her with half-closed eyes, "I beg your pardon. My mistake."

"Don't!" she said. "Oh, don't!" There was a silence between them and then she said quickly: "Jap, I'm no baby; I'm a woman. I'm twenty-two! I love you! I want to be in your arms! I know what it means.

I don't expect you to marry me, but oh, I can't just let you go without belonging to you!" She began to cry softly her head upon his shoulder. "You'll go away—I'll lose you and I'll never know what life means. I'll stay in these hateful old hills and get gray and old and life will pass me by, and you'll forget all about me! Oh, Jap!"

His arms went about her, his mouth pressed hot against hers. And Jap, being the nice boy he was, didn't think she was setting a trap for him; he never once thought she was easy or bold, he wasn't that kind. He thought she was rather wonderful, and for that moment he wanted her as much as she wanted him.

"Give me two weeks, Jap darling. I'll be good; I'll not ask for more!" she begged, her voice low.

Now, most young men of Jap's high-powered fascination simply loved 'em and left them. Not Jap, he wasn't like that; he had a heart that could be easily touched and he had that most unfortunate thing, a conscience that bothered him. He laid that to the long line of decent Browns who had gone before him. He liked Meg, he almost loved her, but he didn't want to hurt her, and really he didn't want her at all, but when she said again, in her sweet voice:

"I love you so, Jap!"

Well, really, you couldn't expect a young man who hadn't been a Galahad all his days not to be kind. That would be almost too much to expect.

Fortunately for Meggsie and her dream of love, that two weeks in June was as "rare" as the poet sang; they were marvelous. The weather was made for love, and the fates were kind to this girl who had dared. They gave her sunny days, and Lake Louise was at her loveliest; coldly

blue beneath the warm blue skies.

Of course, it is admitted that Jap was the heavy villain in all this beauty, but he was a most enticing villain, with his charming smile, his merry blue eyes, his good manners, Meg found him as adorable as her dreams of him had been. He was always gentle, always happy and even-tempered. It was really a wonderful thing for both of them; but while Jap thought only of the days as they passed, Meggsie, as women always do, thought of the end of those two weeks, but she gave no sign. She was really very wise, the little Meggsie.

They had a cottage to themselves and went to the hotel for their meals, eating on one of those adorable balconies that overhang the water. They had eyes for no one, and people looked at them and sighed, even as they smiled; they were both so young, so altogether charming, so much in love. Honeymooners, they thought them.

Meggsie had blossomed into a beauty that was amazing. Jap looked at her and marveled at her charm. He had never known she was so amazing, lovely. He was happy, content; Meg made a delightful companion. He never felt better; he had lost that nasty cough, and was brown and hard.

But time passed and there were only two more days to go and their two weeks would be at an end. Jap, hating to think of it, put it out of his mind. Still there was a craving to take his baton in hand, flash that smile and hear the thunder of applause. He wished sometimes that he had the nerve to marry Meg, but he always came back to that feeling that a young man married is a young man marred.

Meg was gentler, sweeter than ever that day, but she was quieter too. Once he thought he saw tears in those gray eyes, but when he questioned her she only laughed at him

and drew away from his arms. That night she said:

"You've given me the happiest time, Jap! I never knew that life could be so sweet. I love you, Jap! I love you more than ever! Always remember that!"

He drew close and said:

"I love you too, Meggsie darling!"

It was strange, perhaps, that his thoughts never went beyond the days. Sometimes he had wondered what would become of Meg; but, to him, she belonged in the library there at the foot of the hills.

That night she held him close in her arms and he had gone to sleep with his head on her soft breast. But the next morning when he awoke there was no Meg. He called, but there was no answer. Somehow, a vague foreboding came to him; he jumped up and called loudly, wildly, and then he saw a note on Meg's pillow. He read:

"Dear, dearest, darling Jap:

"The two weeks are up tomorrow and, because there's to be no tears, no regrets, no sorrow, to mar this lovely holiday, I'm going away. When you awake I'll be gone.

"We may never meet again, but don't, oh, don't forget me! And remember that I love you.

Good-by, my darling,

"Meggsie."

And there where she had signed her name was the mark of a tear.

At first he was filled with wrath: that she could leave me like that, he thought. And then he was filled with dismay. He suddenly realized that in taking Meg he had taken on a responsibility for her. He couldn't let her go like that. The poor lovely kid! he thought. If anything should happen to her!

You see, Jap wasn't cut out for a

seducer; his conscience played tricks with him. . . He went to Elmfield. To hell with contracts, he decided; I'll marry her!

But Elmfield couldn't help him.

"Vacation?" they told him. "Why, she didn't get a vacation; she resigned. She ain't got no folks here; they're all dead; and no one knows where she went."

Jap felt rather sick, but what could he do? It suddenly struck him how little she had told him about herself. It was all about him, the things they had talked of. He felt a sudden scorn of himself.

London, Paris, Berlin! For two years they acclaimed him. Jap Devon and his band was always busy and in demand. Meg had become one of those dreams that come and go; in them she was always radiant and fair, always loving and giving; there was kiss, passion for passion.

But he was no anchorite—there were women,—too many of them; lovely women in gorgeous clothes, wearing furs and jewels, trailing their chiffons, their delicate perfume, through the fashionable places where Jap played, making a play for Jap Devon because of his music, his smile.

But don't think Jap played the fool or let his ego get away from him. When he felt he was feeling a bit the "real thing" he laughed at himself, for he had a sense of humor.

"Jasper Brown," he'd say whimsically, "you behave!" And that was that.

Two years of it and then home! America wanted him, and in his heart America called. Meggsie wasn't in it at all. Meg was now only a dream, along with blue skies and a lovely blue lake gleaming in a June sun. He would have run away from a flesh-and-blood Meggsie. She wouldn't be, or

couldn't be, as he dreamed her. . . .

New York again. He knew as he walked along the Avenue that he loved it; loved its sunsets, its crowd; even the tawdriness of Broadway at night, with its myriad lights. . . .

It was in the new Waldorf, one late afternoon, that he met Terry Carroll. Carroll was a rich young man; rich despite the depression,—with houses and polo ponies and race-horses, a yacht and all the usual impedimenta of riches. Carroll had been Jap's buddy at the varsity, and they loved each other.

"Jap," Terry cried, "dear old Jap! Just the one man I'd have picked to meet. You've got to dine with me."

"I hardly think I can," Jap told him. "Ten o'clock I have my engagement, you know,—the band. I'm a working man, old sport."

"That's hours yet!" Terry said. "Jap, I'm going to be married! She's the loveliest thing, my girl. I want you to meet her. My brother's coming too. You see, Jap, my brother doesn't want me to marry her; she works! He thinks that is *infra dig*. Can you imagine it,—in this day and age? You'll be the leaven. Come along, like a real pal."

And Jap went.

The dinner was to be in Carroll's apartment, and Jap and Terry arrived first. They were gay and laughing in the pantry shaking up drinks when the bell rang.

"It's my girl," Terry said, as his manservant went to answer it.

"You go along. I'll stay here and finish this hummer," Jap told him.

Terry left him and then Jap heard a voice. It made him stop shaking the cocktails and listen. It was a faintly familiar, sweet voice; it stirred faint memories in his breast. His heart began to beat fast and faster. The thought came to him that Terry had never told him his girl's name.

Before he could pull himself together, the bell rang again. The brother had arrived. There came the faint murmur of voices and then he heard Terry's brother speak in a cold, hard voice:

"But surely I have seen you before, . . . I remember well. It was two years ago at Lake Louise. You were supposed to be honeymooning there—as a Mrs. Brown!"

Jap stepped to the swinging door and pushed it so that he could look through. It was Meggsie!

She was standing there, a lovely, marvelous Meggsie; her honey-colored hair was turned into a golden crown by the lights; her vivid gray eyes were black with excitement; her lips were brightly red against the dead-white of her face. The soft white lace against her breast rose and fell under the stress of her emotion.

The truth of it flashed to Jap in that instant. He loved her and had always loved her. He wanted her now, bitterly; the thought of those passionate days was like a poignant pain. He'd been a fool! Meg was lovelier even than she had been in his dreams.

Then he heard her speak:

"You might be mistaken!"

And then came Terry's voice, high pitched:

"It's not true! Tell him it's not true, Meg!"

"Why should I?" she said coldly.

It flamed across Jap's heart that she was not afraid.

And then it was Terry's brother who spoke:

"It's lucky you found out before you married her, Terry, just what she is!"

He would have gone on, but Jap stepped out into the room.

"Be careful what you say!" he said.

And then the man almost screamed:

"And that's the man! The man, *Brown!*"

Meg stared, her face whiter than ever, her eyes were like stars.

"Jap!" she cried.

But Jap only smiled and said:

"A lady can honeymoon, can't she? There's no law against it, is there? And then a quiet trip to Paris, a quiet divorce! Brown's a common name, you know, Carroll. They don't make a fuss over the Browns, as they might over Devon."

"It was *you!*" Terry cried.

Jap felt sorry for Terry. He wanted to comfort him; wanted to pat him on the back. Terry was taking it hard. But Jap only said:

"I don't like your brother, Terry. He's got a nasty mind!"

It was then that Meg said, her voice far away:

"But it's true, Terry, it's true! Jap is lying like a gentleman, but we weren't married. Don't blame Jap, it was all my fault. He never loved me, but I loved him—I love him now. I always will love him!" She pulled off the pear-shaped diamond she wore and handed it to Terry. "I'm sorry, Terry!" Then she moved toward the door swiftly, but quick as she was, Jap was quicker.

"I'll take you home, Meggsie," he said.

Then he turned to the two men standing there:

"And Meg is wrong, all wrong," he told them; "I did love her and I do. You see, I'm going to marry her, if she will have me, tomorrow morning, when that place where you get the license opens. It's going to be as soon as that!" He walked toward the door with Meggsie, and then he turned: "And when any one tells you a young man married is a young man married, you can take it from me he's a fool!"

DARK NIGHT

By Esther Kalcik

HAROLD KANE, as a man who was about to get married and had lived to the full a very rich young life, was in a properly reminiscent frame of mind. He was thinking over the past—the women who had shared his happy-go-lucky, carefree life with him—and putting it behind him. He was very much in love with Muriel; he owed it to her to forget the old gay past.

But then, Harold wasn't a man who took his experiences very seriously. He fell in love easily, and just as easily fell out. He had loved 'em and left 'em. But there had been one. Almost without his knowing it, it was this one which made him review the whole past, made him think of all the others; a sort of unforgettable and fitting climax to a man who had had everything his way. For he was handsome as well as debonair—a combination which women found it hard to resist.

In his very early youth, when he was twenty—twelve years ago—there had been that little one, Mina, who hadn't wanted his money. She had loved him passionately, devotedly, as a very young girl loves. She had given herself to him without a price; love alone was her sufficient reward. Had he been a different sort of a chap,—had women's love come to him not so easily, had he been less rich, less well-favored,—he might have married her. It would have been sweet to be married to her, too. She was a loving little thing. He would

have had a home, a hearth, and pretty, ruddy-headed babies. She was so pretty, this little Mina.

But early—as early as that—he had found he was not that kind; not the marrying kind. He had left her, although he had been sorry. It had hurt him that she had refused to take some of the money of which he had so much. He was generous that way.

But other women had come to him so easily, that he had soon forgotten her.

There had been others, as sweet, as yielding, as childish. He had loved them all, been generous with them, and left them. It was inevitable that there should be some among them who were not as disinterested as Mina; some had taken him along with Park Avenue apartments, Japanese servants, sables and diamonds. But he had no regrets; he had had a good time with them all; and he had no troublesome conscience. He knew they had had as good a time as he, and he would not be thinking of them now except for the fact that he was about to be married—and there was that one adventure that wouldn't be forgotten. . . .

It had been on a dark night on the beach in Miami; so dark that you couldn't see your hand ahead of you, and very warm. There had been cocktail parties in his room till two in the morning. It was full of smoke and noisy—booze-noisy—friends.

Suddenly he had been tired of it all, bored; all this noise, the stifling at-

mosphere and careless women. He was suddenly and unaccountably irritated with them. He heard the sea booming outside, felt the darkness and the heat of a semi-tropical night. He had a sudden longing for the sting of the salt air in his face, the feeling of the warm sand beneath him, the enveloping velvet of the dark, sweet night.

He shut the door on himself softly in his bedroom, swiftly changed to a scant pair of trunks and a robe, and stole out.

The air was languorous, caressing. He breathed deeply, glad of his escape from that smoke- and gin-filled room. After all, he was getting on, he told himself—thirty; time to change all that, settle down. He had had as much as a man can stand of that sort of life. Time to marry, start something nice and constructive. Have children of his own, have a wife he knew no other man shared. These women were all so free,—as free as men; taking their pleasures where they found them, now here, now there. One couldn't be sure when a woman came in to you, starry-eyed, from the wide verandah, in whose arms she had been last.

Swiftly he walked down to the beach, found a secluded spot, threw off his robe and buried himself deep in the warm, luxuriant sand; glad that he had got away into the dark, velvet night. He closed his eyes and let himself drift off to sleep.

He didn't know how long he slept, but he woke to the sound of weeping,—a very young girl's desperate weeping. He opened his eyes, but it was so dark that he couldn't see a foot ahead of him; yet the weeping was close, so close that he could put his hand out and touch the young unhappy one.

He did. He put his hand out and touched her. It was meant to be com-

forting. A very small girl it was, his hand told him; a very thin, young, sweet thing. His hand traveled, sympathetically, to the shock of curls on her head. "Whew!" he thought, "they must have gone on growing long after she stopped." So small and alone and pathetic. And beautiful. He knew it instinctively. Her voice was so childish, so forlorn. But at his touch she had stopped crying. She had drawn away from him, as she said:

"Go away!"

"I will if you want me to," he had said.

At which she had sat up and peered at him through the dark. He had had a glimpse of long lashes, and pansy-blue eyes—(only he couldn't be sure of that in the dark; they might have been any shade of blue, but he preferred to think them pansy-blue)—and the gleam of a fair young face, tear-stained.

She seemed to have discovered something too, as she peered at him, although neither of them could see each other clearly.

"Oh," she said, and there was distinct relief in her tear-trembling voice, "so it's not you! You can stay; you're nothing to me,—you or any other man."

She had quarreled with some one—some one who had been brutal to her young innocence. It was easy to see that. Perhaps she was working for a living—dancing, or singing at an inn or a night club. This hour of the morning . . . Poor little thing! Harold's heart went out to her.

Suddenly an electric current passed between them. She was lying so quiet in the sand beside him, her thin white dress a faint shimmer in the dark, the shine of her hair, the brightness of her eyes piercing the gloom. She had moved closer to him like a trusting child.

Almost without knowing it, with a feeling that was distinctly different from any he had ever had for any woman before, he put his arms out and drew her to him. He held her close to him—so precious in his arms—and kissed her dewy little face and eyes and lips; held her till their passion became fiercer, something that would not be allayed. . . .

Much later—he couldn't measure time; it might have been an hour or two or more, only it was still dark—she had suddenly jumped from his arms and run into the ocean.

He heard the splash of her good swimming-stroke in the water as he ran in after her. He called to her—words of endearment, for he didn't know her name—but she only answered him with a small, mocking laugh. So he had lost her—lost the most precious thing he had ever found.

For somehow he knew that this girl was not like the others. He would have staked his life on it that she was innocent and sweet and good. A common thing had drawn them together, this beautiful thing they had both felt. He knew he loved that girl as he had never loved any other. He knew she was beautiful and good and true. He knew that she loved him—in the dark. He knew that, for her, it was her first great experience. But panic had taken her away from him. . . . Now he would never know.

He had spent the following weeks in a steady search for her—all along the beach, at night-clubs, in dance halls, anywhere that he thought there was the faintest chance of finding her.

But, after all, he had only instinct to guide him. He could not say what she looked like, except that she was tiny, and had long lashes and curly bright hair, and eyes that he wanted to be pansy-blue. And there were so many who could answer to that de-

scription! But his heart told him that not one of these was the girl he sought, the little one of that beautiful night's adventure.

He had gone back to New York rather discouraged and had decided to marry the next nice girl he met.

Then he met Muriel.

Muriel was small and sweet; she had long lashes that were longer at the sides of her eyes,—eyes that were pansy-blue—and a lot of tawny bright curls.

Harold's heart turned over in him at the sight of her. If it were she!

He questioned her guilefully, then, when he got to know her better and knew that he wanted to marry her more than he had ever wanted to marry any girl in his life—except that one. Had she, by any chance, been in Miami in January of the previous year?

"No," she said, a little frown drawing her fine brows together, "no. I was in New York then, dancing at The Twenty Club. Why?" and she broke into smiles and dimples. "Why, big boy?" She raised herself on her toes and gently kissed him.

He enfolded her, held her close to him because it hurt. He had so wished it were she.

"Oh, nothing," he had said, nonchalantly, because it hurt. "Nothing; just wondered."

That afternoon, when Harold had left her apartment—he would drop in every morning to say "Cheerio!" as soon as she was awake)—Muriel had settled herself on the wide studio couch; made a nice mound of little cushions in a corner and snuggled in, kimono-clad and warm and cozy, with cigarettes and matches and a long amber holder that brought out little flecks of light in her beautiful blue eyes.

But she wasn't smoking. She just played with the holder, and some-

times tapped her little white teeth with it, and looked thoughtfully off into space. She was very serious—for Muriel; still so much of a child that it seemed almost a pose. But the blue eyes were very grave, and the fine brows drew together sometimes on a perplexed thought as they had that afternoon when Harold had asked her that funny question.

Still frowning on that question, she too must go over her past, must put it behind her, for she was about to marry Harold, whom she adored, and this was a good time to think it all over and turn a new leaf.

Oh, not much! She was still only nineteen. But a girl as pretty and small and defenceless as Muriel doesn't work in night clubs and road-houses for four years without being—Well, soiled, somehow. She had gotten out of many tight places, but there had been close calls. Huge feet stepping on her tiny ones and telling her they loved her,—pawing her every chance they got on the floor because she wouldn't go out with them outside of her work hours.

Then that winter in Miami,—she wouldn't tell any one about that, not even Harold; it was her own private, precious secret, the one beautiful adventure of her life,—when she had run away from one just like that, and thrown herself sobbing on the sands.

She had thought herself alone at that hour of the morning and in that great darkness, and had sobbed her heart out. Men—beasts—with their hot hands on her virgin youth. Why couldn't they let her alone? She was paid to dance, not to be stepped on and pawed and soiled. She cried her heart out because for three years then she had been alone and fighting her way in the world. And men making it so hard for her.

Then a hand had come out of the dark and touched her. She had

thought it was that one following her, and had shrunk away and cried:

"Go away!"

But it hadn't been he—or any one like him—at all. In the gloom he had seemed like a god who had come out of the sea. His voice was low and understanding and sympathetic. His light hand on her shoulder was not pawing; but gentle, comforting, caressing.

She had wanted to share her troubles with this kindly god, pour her little heart out to him. What were deities for if not for crises like this?

She had dabbed at her eyes and crept closer to him. And suddenly she had become aware of his hand on her shoulder. And it was not at all what it had been. She felt an electric current go through her body. She had never felt anything so delightful in her life before. And suddenly she was shaken with a trembling from head to foot and almost swooned in the thought of her love for this stranger whose face she couldn't see in the dark. He was taking her gently into his arms; and closing her eyes and sighing, she gave herself up to their fierce need for each other, their suddenly awakened passion.

Strange that he should have asked her that question, she thought, the puzzled frown drawing her pansy-blue eyes together. Had he seen her at the Club Alveredo? She didn't remember seeing him. . . . She didn't want him to know about that adventure. It had been so short,—so short and so perfect! She would have that memory always. She would share it with no one—not even Harold. After all, he was a man and must have secrets of his own; secrets which he wouldn't tell her.

This precious secret was her own treasure, hers—and that strange man's!

THE PURE OF HEART

By Cyril Plunkett

ROSA DANIELS was murdered just before nine-thirty, and it was less than ten minutes later when Bill Talbot and his brother Jake crossed the Highway and told Emma Howling to call the sheriff.

Rosa sold beer. It was said she did other things, too. And "Rosa's place," as it was called, was about a mile from town, just beyond the Howlings' and across the Highway. You drove through Main Street—two blocks of stores and the bank and the "city" hall—crossed the old steel bridge and turned abruptly to the left and up the hill. It was a steep hill and one had time before reaching its top to observe the half-dozen houses that squatted drunkenly on its side. The road fell away then in a long, easy grade and the first brick house on the right belonged to Fred Howling who lived with his daughter, Emma.

If any one had taken the trouble to cross Fred Howling's lawn and creep up to his porch of a night they would have seen Emma Howling seated in the big chair before the window, the room dark except for a crackling fire in the grate, staring out at the Highway, at Rosa's. It was sort of a habit with her, and still not a habit. It had grown out of a deep emotion and then become a habit. Had one asked Emma about it she would have told you that her evenings were dreary and lonesome and that she liked to watch the cars go by. It was well known that Fred lay night after night on the

couch in the dining-room, sleeping. And Emma had always said she couldn't get interested in reading, so there wasn't anything else to do but sit by the window.

That would have been Emma's explanation.

Emma was twenty-five, a little worn-looking. Her eyes were deep-set and often circled; thoughtful eyes with a hint of something else within them,—something vague. She wore her brown hair long, tied up in a knot at her neck. It had a tendency to escape and fall in stray wisps around her face, and she was forever, unconsciously and ineffectively, tucking it back. Then she would smooth down her dress over her hips. She had a nice figure, inclined to be plump. She looked older than her age.

But her hands were long and slender and well kept in spite of the housework, for Emma had managed the Howling home—with a brief interval of a year when she had left town and Fred had hired a housekeeper—from the time her mother had passed away, long before.

At about nine o'clock this night Emma lay back in her chair and she could see the dark blot of Rosa's house, a yellow light glowing from its front room. There were three cars standing just off the lane, three cars which had discharged their freight of men. She thought of what people said of Rosa and she thought of herself and gradually her mind turned, as it always did, to the one brief

drama in her life. She went back, piecing everything together and she remembered Corbin Rymers and the year in Columbus—and Rosa as she had known her then.

Rosa worked in a restaurant not far from the University, on High Street. It was a nice little place and Rosa wore a crisp, white uniform and was nice, too. Anybody could see that. A little quiet, but ready to smile at any one, to be friendly. She was the first friendly person Emma saw; perhaps because she saw her but a short time after she got off the bus.

Columbus had seemed strange and aloof until then, until she read the ad in the *Dispatch* for a waitress and entered the restaurant on High Street.

"I saw in the paper—" Emma began.

"Oh, yes," Rosa smiled, "but the boss is out now."

"He hasn't hired any one yet?" Emma asked.

"Not yet, but plenty have been in. The girls in this town are pretty busy, I guess; they couldn't wait. Mr. Jones will be here any time now."

"Then, I'll wait," Emma said and sat down at the counter.

She ordered a cup of coffee and sipped it thoughtfully. She wondered what her father was doing and she was glad suddenly that she had left home. If she could get a job. . . . She had to find work because she had scarcely any money.

"Live here?" Rosa asked.

"No, I just got here," Emma said. And then she added: "From up north."

"I came from Cambridge," Rosa said. "Know anybody there?"

"No," Emma said.

Rosa went out in the kitchen and presently she came back with her hands full of dishes and behind her was a man,—Mr. Jones.

"Any experience?" Mr. Jones asked.

Emma said no, but she had done housework and she needed a job and she was willing to learn, and—finally Mr. Jones told her to come along to the kitchen and he gave her a uniform and turned her over to Rosa. By that time it was nearly three o'clock and Rosa said there would be some business soon and told her what to do. She said there was no reason to be anxious or worried, because she would be there to help, all she could.

"You got a room near here?" Rosa asked suddenly.

"Why," Emma said, "I haven't got one anywhere. I——"

"Well," Rosa said practically, "you got to stay somewhere. My girl friend went home last week and I got a double over on Fourth; just a nice walk. Want to come along?"

"I'd be glad to," Emma said.

So she went to live with Rosa. Rosa was older—Emma guessed about twenty-three—and she knew quite definitely what life was about. Emma envied her, and still there wasn't really much to envy. Rosa had dates three or four nights a week, but she didn't brag about good times. She didn't say much at all, except sometimes: "Bill's a good sort; knows how to treat a girl." Or: "That guy Eddie Brannagan's a two-hour egg, honey. Fresh. I had to tell him again last night where to get off. Believe me, he's out after this! I got to trot around back of the counter all day as it is, without walking home nights."

Eddie Brannagan. He ate regularly at the restaurant. He went to the University and had a car. Emma watched him for a week, wondering what she'd do if he asked her to go out with him. But he never asked her, and she could only imagine what might happen if she went. She often wondered if Rosa knew how she lay

night after night, thinking, shivering.

It all began because of her father, this thinking. If he hadn't—

"You got to be careful," he preached, oh, for years and years, "or you will be like your mother. You got her lips and eyes and you're going to have her body. She had the devil in her, Emma; too many ideas. She wanted too much."

Strange. What had her mother wanted? Emma had worried about her lips and eyes, too. She had been almost afraid to go to the mirror for fear of seeing a devil, or perhaps two of them, one staring from each eye. But she went to the mirror and she couldn't see anything wrong at all. She had full red lips and her eyes were only gray and a little troubled. And remembering suddenly that she was going to have her mother's body, she stole upstairs to undress and look at it. It was slim and, well, bony, but a few years had taken care of that. It became soft and rounded and white, and she discovered a rather vague pleasure in looking at it, stroking it. She wondered if this pleasure meant that the devils were coming and she was afraid, and, still anticipatory.

Everything changed after that. She grew conscious of the boys in her class at school, and when, sometimes, they and their friends drove out and stopped to talk, she wished they hadn't come, mostly on account of father. He'd shake his head and scowl.

"This riding around in cars, parking," he'd say later, when they were alone, "is bad business. I don't know what those young people's parents can mean to permit it. All the evil in the world starts that way. They get out alone in the dark and then suffer for it in after years. 'Specially the girls. It's the girls who pay, Emma; remember that. Don't ever let any man touch you or you'll regret it to

your dying day. You'll be an object of shame and always wish—when it's too late to wish."

He was always saying things like that. Riddles, making you want to go and still afraid for fear the gray shroud of shame would fall upon you and you'd never get rid of it. You couldn't help leaving him, running away.

But why didn't Rosa ever ask her to go along on dates? It was this thing of going out, of having a good time, of meeting boys, of being with them, that had brought her to Columbus. She was twenty years old and tired of a life of repression. And three weeks had passed and she had gone home every night, to sit alone or wash out her clothes; to think now, as she had thought back in the house on the Highway. She was still missing the lovely things that happened to one on dates, that must inevitably happen,—like Rosa and Eddie Branagan.

It made her angry, rebellious, and one night Rosa came home and found her sobbing.

"But, Emma!" Rosa said inadequately.

"It's all right for you to talk," Emma said; "you got lots of friends; you go out with fellows and everything. And I got to stay here alone, and I'm tired of it."

"I don't blame you," Rosa said. "But, Emma, you never told me much about yourself; I thought maybe you had a steady back home or something. I'll fix it up, Emma. We'll go to a show or a dance or something."

Emma didn't know how to dance and she didn't want to go to a show. She could see a show by herself, anytime. She was thinking of "dates," like her father had always said; parked cars. She wanted—oh, she didn't know *what* she wanted, but—

Two nights later Rosa and Emma

went to a movie. Emma was with Corbin Rymers.

Corbin was a lot like Rosa; he was nice. It seemed, he came from Cambridge, too, and Rosa had known him for years. He was a salesman, about Rosa's age, and was in and out of Columbus, remaining there a few days each time. They had a lovely time. They drank soda after the movie. They parked a half-hour in front of the house on Fourth and then the girls got out and Corbin drove Rosa's friend home.

Emma cried again that night, silently, and the only ray of hope was that Corbin had asked her if he might call again sometime.

He came a week later and Rosa had a date, so Emma went with him to a movie, alone.

They were out by ten o'clock and Corbin asked her if she was thirsty. Emma said she wasn't thirsty at all, but it was a lovely night, wasn't it? Corbin agreed with her. And the moon, wasn't it gorgeous? It was beautiful, Corbin said. Emma said it put her in mind of the country, of her home. She liked the country at night. It was so quiet and peaceful and when it was warm like this you just wanted to stay and stay and drink in the air, and—

Corbin drove her out in the country.

They came to a stream and there was a road angling off the highway beside it. Emma sighed and said she knew a stream just like that at home and, if you followed it, it came to a woods where you could have dandy picnics and everything. Sometime they'd have to have a picnic. Maybe there was a woods along this stream! It would be just too funny if there was.

There was. A dark woods and a quiet road and Emma was surprised at herself that she had been so clever.

It was almost as if it weren't she at all but some one else who had taken possession of her, and, driving down the side road, she sat just a little nearer to Corbin and her voice was just a little lower and she remembered that she had her mother's eyes and lips, the lips with devils in them. She knew what the devils were now and they left her curiously weak with anticipation. It was wonderful to have devils like this in one's body. They lifted you up and made your mind so clear and cold, albeit the body burned. They made you adroit and, at the same time, lulled you with a sense of inevitability, so that you almost believed you hadn't planned every minute of the last hour. They prompted you to smile and put your hand on his. Perhaps they even prompted him to stop and shut off the motor.

"This would be a nice place for a picnic," Corbin said, nodding. His voice caught a little.

"Yes," Emma said and her voice caught, too. But now that they had stopped she was trembling suddenly with fear. She remembered all her father had said, and that gray shroud that had always been just beyond the horizon seemed to be hovering over her. But then her heart screamed to her to forget foolishness. She'd wanted to park, hadn't she? Well! . . . She'd only find out things, get a thrill. And she wondered what Corbin would say if he could see her body, so pink and white and warm.

She sighed and Corbin put his arm around her. She drew away, suddenly realizing that all along, wanting him close, she had feared he would come close. She trembled, her mind racing, incoherent, and Corbin kissed her. He kissed her again and then she returned his kisses and she was almost in tears. She couldn't decide if it was because she was so happy or be-

cause he didn't further force himself upon her.

"You're so nice, Emma!" he said.

And she opened her lips and said something to him and her arms tightened around his neck.

When she came home, very late, she crept stealthily into her room, feeling curiously depressed, despising herself.

The next day she told Rosa she hated Corbin Rymers and didn't ever want to see him again. Rosa was kind and seemed to think it was her fault because she had brought them together. She said she'd give Corbin a piece of her mind when she saw him. And she was a true friend all the year Emma remained in Columbus. And even after.

Emma returned home then and resumed her life quietly with her father. It was almost three years later that Rosa Daniels came to live on the Highway. Emma, who had written to her regularly, helped find the house, suggesting it. Of course, with Rosa selling beer and her reputation and all, she couldn't very well be friendly.

An unkempt yard; a walk overgrown with dying weeds; a frame house unpainted for years, small porch sagging in its middle; a crumbling woodshed and two pine trees that sighed all winter long, shivering in the wind,—that was Rosa's place. The house had been empty until Rosa, with her small child, took it. In the summer the child, a boy, played behind the woodshed. He was thin and white and ill looking. After September no one ever saw him outside, and during the day the house seemed deserted. Nights, as many as six cars stood parked in the lane.

When Bill Talbot and his brother Jake drove into Rosa's yard at eight-fifteen that night, they saw that

Dink's car was already there. The yellow light glowed in the front room, but there was no sign of Dink or Rosa. Bill laughed and turned out his lights.

"That guy Dink has sure got the inside track," he said.

"Yeah," Jake grunted and got out and felt the radiator. "Think she'll freeze?" he asked.

"Naw," Bill said; "'tain't cold enough."

"The hell it ain't," Jake said. "You ought to give the can a little more alky instead of swillin' it all down your belly."

"If you'd drink more beer," Bill grinned, "and pay less attention to Rosa——"

Jake shrugged glumly.

"Swell chance I got with Dink hangin' around," he said.

Bill laughed again.

"Anybody can make them women," he said. "Come on in."

They went up on the porch and knocked at the door. After a minute Rosa let them in.

"Hello," she said and smiled. It was a wan smile. When she took Jake's coat her hand touched his and it twitched slightly and seemed to hang there, seeking comfort.

"Where's Dink?" Jake asked.

"Out in the kitchen, tight," she said.

Jake stood six feet tall and a black stubble covered his chin. He had on a leather jacket and a khaki shirt, open at the neck. His vague gray eyes followed Rosa and Bill chuckled as he went up to the stove to warm his hands.

Rosa looked her twenty-eight years, although save for her listlessness, the despairing droop of her shoulders, the lines of care around her mouth and eyes, she might still have been beautiful. She was very dark, black of hair and eyes, her lips so red they seemed

feverish; but her skin was white,—dead white even in the yellow light. In spite of her thinness her breasts swelled with gentle loveliness and, in the tight-fitting black dress she wore, her thighs showed rounded and long and straight.

"How's the kid?" Jake asked then.

"He's got a cough," Rosa said. "I put him to bed. You boys want some beer?"

"Sure," Bill said; "a couple quarts for me. Dink go to sleep?"

"I wish he would," Rosa said and she went to the kitchen.

Jake sat down and stared at the stove. It crackled cheerfully and puffed with every blast of wind, its breath pungent. An aged couch, its leather cracked, and two or three chairs, faced it. The yellow lamp glowed on patiently far back, on a stand. There was a faded carpet on the floor, sprinkled with a fine sifting of ashes just below the stove. From the kitchen came the sound of Rosa opening the bottles, three sharp *pops*, and then an angry muttering. Bill grinned and looked at Jake.

"Who's them guys?" they heard Dink say.

"Bill and Jake," Rosa answered.

"Huh," Dink said, "them guys? They come here almost every night."

"They're good customers," Rosa said.

"Customers hell! Think I don't see Jake lookin' at you? Think I don't know he's keen on you? Some day I'm gonna bat you in the jaw; that's what I'm gonna do—bat you in the jaw." Jake stiffened, slowly subsided. He continued to look at the stove. "Hangin' around here all the time," Dink whined on. "How do I know you ain't—" His voice lowered, became a murmur.

"You ought to know that," Rosa said. "You're here all the time, too."

"Night after night," Dink whim-

pered. "Givin' you money an' drinkin' your lousy beer—an' what do I get? What do I get? I'm askin' you."

"Yes," Rosa said. She came through the doorway with three bottles and the glasses.

Bill laughed boisterously.

"If he got that way on your beer it ain't lousy," he said.

She smiled slightly.

"He didn't," she said. "He always brings whiskey with him."

She filled Jake's glass and then suddenly there was a crash in the kitchen and Dink stood in the doorway, his bloodshot eyes sweeping over them, his lips curling as they rested on Jake. Dink, who seemed to have plenty of money, who "laid up" at Rosa's place. He was in his shirt-sleeves and his hair fell over his forehead. He waved a bottle at Bill Talbot.

"Have a drink?" he said.

"Sure," Bill said.

Dink sat down and Rosa went back into the kitchen. Jake got up, following her.

"Why don't you tie a can to that guy?" he asked.

She looked up at him. They could hear Dink's voice droning from the next room; Bill's chuckle. She shook her head.

"Jake," she said, "I got to live."

"Not with him," Jake said.

She shuddered.

"No, not quite with him," she said.

They were interrupted by the lights of a car sweeping in from the Highway. The lights darkened and there were voices, then a deep laugh. Rosa hurried to the front of the house and opened the door. Jake, standing in the kitchen doorway, saw Ike Little, who was six feet three and as strong as an ox; with him a stranger. He went in and said hello to them while Rosa took their coats and brought

them beer. Ike slapped Dink on the back and began to joke with him, but Dink was surly, disdaining to answer, or spitting out a single, vicious oath. And then suddenly he got up and staggered back to the kitchen. For the next half-hour Rosa divided her time between the two rooms.

The four men had been talking when, suddenly, they stopped as one.

"The hell you ain't!" Dink screamed. "You dirty slut."

Then Rosa's voice, scarcely raised, but vibrant and sharp:

"Shut up; you'll wake the kid."

"Who cares about that brat?" Dink wanted to know harshly, and there was a sound of scuffling.

Jake became taut. He started to rise, but Bill reached over and shoved him forcibly back in his chair.

"Stay out o' this," he snapped. "She can take care of him."

Jake muttered something to himself and sank back, his fingers twitching. Ike Little banged a bottle on the floor and shouted "More beer!" and Rosa came in, flashing him a grateful glance. She didn't look at Jake.

She shut the door between them when she returned to the kitchen, but they could hear Dink haranguing again. The stranger passed cigarettes and was about to strike a light when they heard a shrill oath from the back room, and immediately following it a scream of stark terror. The four men seemed momentarily frozen and then Ike Little's big body crashed to the door, Jake right behind him. They saw Dink standing, his mouth opened wonderingly, his right hand clasping the neck of a broken bottle which dripped red.

Rosa lay on the floor. . . .

Ike leaped forward. An iron fist thudded into Dink's jaw; he gasped and fell backward, moaning. Jake was kneeling beside Rosa, lifting her in his arms. Her red lips had become

a ghastly pink. Her chin pointed ceilingward and she gasped for breath. Her lids had been closed, but now they lay half back while nothing but the whites of her eyes showed beneath. She shuddered, once.

"My God!" Bill cried. "She's dyin'!" And he knelt on her other side and felt of her heart.

"She's dead," he said then, in an awed voice.

They didn't move, wondering, trying to regain their scattered thoughts. Dink moaned again and started to get up. Four pairs of eyes turned to him and Jake laid Rosa's still form back on the floor. His eyes drooped slightly. He seemed to rise with one flowing motion, effortless, his lips twitching, and then Bill caught him by the shoulder, swinging him around.

"Let me go!" Jake shouted.

"I will like hell," Bill said grimly. "She wasn't worth *that*!"

The stranger clutched Jake's other arm. It trembled and Jake was panting. Ike stood glowering and then Dink seemed suddenly to see and a scream left his lips.

"Rosa!" he cried. He flung himself down beside her, fumbling with her arms, her damp hair, his hands coming away bloodstained. "Rosa, talk to me!" he pleaded.

"She can't, you idiot," Ike said. "You killed her."

"I—" Dink quavered. "Oh, my God!"

"Jake," Bill whispered, "you get out o' here; get the sheriff. . . . We got to get Jake out o' here; Ike. Can you hold that monkey till we get back?"

"You're damn right I can," Ike said grimly.

"Rosa!" Dink cried, stroking her hand. His voice sank to a frightened whimper: "She was good, I tell you; she was good! I wouldn't lie now; so

help me God, I wouldn't. She took every cent she could get on account of the kid, to get him well. She didn't have anything to do with any of you bums. She didn't have anything to do with me. That's the reason——"

"Shut up!" Jake snapped and Bill jerked him back and out of the kitchen door.

They both shivered as the cold wind swept down on them and they shivered because of what had happened inside. Bill kept his hand on Jake's arm and they started for the road, not quite knowing where they were going.

"Bill," Jake pleaded, "I got to kill that guy."

"You damn fool," Bill said, "you leave him alone. He'll burn for this. Let the law take care of him."

"But, you see——" Jake said helplessly.

Bill's hand pressed down understandingly.

"I know," he said, "but it's a good thing for you she's gone. She was pretty rotten, I guess."

Jake didn't say anything and they stumbled in the lane's ruts, walking swiftly.

"We'll go to the Howlings' and call the sheriff," Bill said suddenly. "They got a phone. I seen the wires already."

He was silent a moment and then began talking again, trying to turn Jake's mind from the tragedy behind and the further tragedy that lay in his heart.

"I hope old Fred Howling's awake," he said. "He's always layin' around sleeping. Be too damn bad if we got to talk to his daughter, Emma. 'S funny, Jake, that a girl like that has got to live across the road from a place like Rosa's. They say she goes to church a lot an' then Sunday-school, an' she never goes out an' don't care anything for men. 'S funny,—a saint on one side the road

an' a devil on the other, eh, Jake? Gee, I hope we don't have to tell Emma Howling about this. 'Tain't right to have to drag a good girl into it. There ain't many like Emma Howling any more, Jake."

Jake plodded on by his side, saying nothing. Two or three cars came over the hill, racing down the other side and there was laughter inside, laughter and song. Young people going out to the Mill, five miles farther on, to dance.

"They don't know somebody was killed over there," Bill said slowly.

They had reached the Howlings' drive and turned in. The reflection of a back light shown from the window and, far above, another light, the moon, just peeping from the clouds. It painted Fred Howling's porch and the clean yard and the walk. The two men hesitated at the porch. Then they climbed the steps and rapped lightly on the door. There was silence inside, followed by the faint sound of footsteps, growing stronger. The door opened and Bill muttered:

"Oh, my gosh!"

Emma Howling stood there.

"Your dad in?" Bill said.

"He's back on the couch," Emma said, "sleeping."

"Oh," Bill said.

Jake looked at Bill and grunted. He said suddenly:

"Listen, miss, will you call the sheriff and tell him to come out to Rosa's place right away?"

Emma caught her breath and she stepped outside, holding the door shut behind her.

"Is it something——" she said. "I don't like to wake father; it makes him angry."

"You don't have to wake him," Jake said stubbornly, "but call the sheriff." And then he added bluntly: "Rosa Daniels has been hit over the head with a bottle and killed, that's all."

Emma swayed and she seemed about to faint.

"Oh! I'll—I'll phone," she said. She was inside, closing the door. They could hear her stumbling down the hall.

"You doggone fool," Bill said; "you had to go an' tell *her*! A poor kid like that, an' a big mutt like you has——"

"Aw, shut up," Jake said. "You been running off at the mouth all night."

The two brothers turned around and plodded back, down the Highway toward the crumbling house that had been Rosa's.

When Emma Howling reached the phone at the end of the hall she stopped and leaned against the wall, clutching her breast. Her eyes darted through the darkness and into the dining-room beyond and she could hear Fred's gentle snoring. She could almost see the rise and fall of his chest and stomach and she shuddered again.

She began to think, a medley of flash-like thoughts, and she realized that her brain was agile as it never had been before, not even during years of thinking. She thought of Rosa Daniels as she had known her years before, and she thought of her as she had seen her sometimes walking to town. And then her father's snoring seemed to bring her back and she took off the receiver and told the operator to send the sheriff to Rosa's place on the Highway right away, that there had been a murder.

She hung up the receiver and tiptoed to the dining-room, but Fred continued to breathe evenly, slowly, and she wondered for a moment whether she should wake him and tell him of the murder or let him sleep. She decided to let him sleep. She went back to the front room, to fall into her chair, staring dumbly at the

yellow light across the highway. There was a steady, deep pounding in her head, a terrible force that threatened to draw her from the chair and out of the door and over to Rosa's place. It left her weak, trembling, shivering.

Rosa, her friend. But no one knew that! Rosa was dead now; no one need ever know! . . .

The fire in the grate across the room crackled suddenly and a blast of wind struck the house. It whined away through the trees and it seemed as though it were Rosa's voice,—Rosa, sobbing, pleading:

"Emma, Emma," it seemed to say, "don't wait! There can't be any question now! Oh, Emma!"

She thought she would scream. The sudden exhaust of a speeding car was like rain to the parched lips of barren ground. She gasped aloud her relief at this disorganization of her thoughts, and then two great headlights crossed the sky and she watched, fascinated, as they dropped again to the road, over the hill. A siren wailed. The sheriff. She saw his car turn into Rosa's lane and several men entered the glare of its lamps, hurrying to the porch.

Men going into Rosa's for the last time. She tried to think of that, to speculate as to the strange things which might have happened there these many nights. She tried to recall Jake's stubble of beard and his bare throat. She tried to revel in thoughts of men, with the painfully exhilarating pleasure of other nights, but these things were curiously flat and tasteless now. She couldn't concentrate; she couldn't think of anything, except——

Back in the dining-room Fred stirred uneasily and Emma caught her breath, praying he would not awaken. If he said: "Go on to bed, Emma," as on other nights. If he— God, she

wouldn't know what to do then. She didn't know what to do now.

Her fingers bit deep into the flesh of her legs, but there was suddenly no joy in the contact. There was only a seething, growing emotion clamoring within her. She tried to look away from Rosa's, out on the Highway, but even her porch ceased to be a porch and became, instead, a stage, a filmy drop through which she could see herself, and the restaurant in Columbus, and Rosa!

"Oh, God!" she sobbed, straining in her chair, but she couldn't draw her eyes away. She got up and ran to the door, opening it, and then she was stumbling down the steps, running toward the Highway.

She saw nothing, nothing but the yellow light of Rosa's. A car narrowly missed her, the angry cursing of its driver lost in its wake. The wind lashed her thinly covered body, sucking greedily at her flesh, but she ran on, unheeding, her breath coming in short, painful gasps.

Then she was in Rosa's lane and there were two men beside one of the cars, the taller man holding something in his arms, something blanketed and softly whimpering. The man was preparing to enter the car and she knew it was Jake Talbot. She tried to cry out, but her voice croaked horribly, hoarsely and she could not understand her own words. Her legs

faltered, threatening to fail her, and she swayed. She heard Jake's startled grunt, a muttering under his breath and then she was facing him, panting.

"The baby, the baby!" she cried hoarsely.

"I got him here, miss," Jake said. "I was gonna see he got a home."

"Give him to me," Emma pleaded. "I'll take him; I'll make him a home."

"Sure; give him to her," Bill said. He jabbed Jake in the back meaningly.

Jake shrugged and awkwardly handed over his charge. He stood watching Emma as she disappeared in the darkness, listening to the faint, unintelligently happy words lingering after her.

"That kid got a lucky break," Bill said. "Good thing it ain't a girl; it might have turned out just like its mother."

Jake didn't say anything.

"Yes, sir," Bill mused, "those things happen, and we'd be here to see it, Jake."

Jake laughed mirthlessly.

"How could you tell then?" he asked.

"That kind?" Bill sniffed. "Anybody can tell."

Out on the Highway, Emma kissed the child breathlessly.

"My baby!" she sobbed. "Oh, I love you, little Corbin darling!"



THE WICHITA VIRGIN

By Van Richards

"NO, Jimmy; give me some time to think. Don't you think you'd better go now?"

Janice pleaded lightly, but withal a serious little wrinkle gathered just above her pert little nose.

The door opened and a puzzled Jimmy—Jim Nash, playboy and clubman—found himself leaving her apartment. He paused.

"Tomorrow?" he questioned and the door was closed softly.

Janice leaned against the door for a moment and then the frightened look gave way to a curious smile. Was the game about over? She wasn't sure. Nash could—and had just intimated that he would—do big things for her.

She went thoughtfully into the bedroom which she shared with Gladys and Nora. It was a real bedroom, full size in spite of the three-room efficiency of the apartment. Standing abstractedly before the mirror, she fumbled at the clasp of her evening gown, size 14, color, blue—baby blue. Yes, she was blonde, with big blue eyes and late from Wichita; as late, she had explained to her room-mates, as three months ago.

The gown collapsed in faint clouds at her feet and she was pleased at the reflection she saw; high, firm breasts; pointed too, maidenly. The girls had alternately teased and loudly envied her. They had said things about virgins,—things girls didn't joke about back in Wichita. Her slim hips and long, cleanly shaped legs

completed the picture. She sighed over the latter, remembering that Gladys had said they were unusual legs,—legs that didn't have the ordinary rolls of fat back of the knee.

Janice wrapped herself in her one and slightly worn *négligé*, crossed those pretty legs comfortably in the best chair and awaited the arrival of her two roommates.

At last they trooped in, exuberant and slightly squiffed.

"Hi, kid," they greeted her, "been waiting up for us?"

"Yes," Janice smiled quietly. Try as she might, it seemed that she couldn't pretend the easy familiarity of these two veteran show-girls. "I want to talk to you about me," she added naively.

"Spill it, baby," Nora replied. "Don't mean to tell me our little virgin is in trouble?" Her intense stare belied her light and careless question.

"No, it isn't that," Janice continued, gulping noticeably, "but I am worried. I was out with Jim Nash again tonight and——"

Both girls straightened up, impressed.

"Say, you ain't so dumb," Gladys exclaimed. "But you're gonna lose that slim whatever it is the poets rave about if you play about with him. He's one hard baby to fool around with."

Nora continued the conversation:

"I suppose he took you to the usual dinner, danced you silly, and tried to neck you all over the taxi home.

Lord knows, Gladys got me in for one hectic evening tonight. That fur-buyer mauled me weak—and him over sixty, if he's a day too! I used the old head against him though, and I believe he's gonna come through with something nice,—a necklace. I didn't give him much room though; it doesn't pay!"

"That's my trouble," Janice said in a worried, small voice. "You see, this Mr. Nash wants to do nice things for me, but it looks like there are some strings to his offers."

"Strings?" Gladys shouted. "Sure there'll be strings on it; there're strings attached to everything! Boy, I'd take it if there were ropes attached! You're not a moron, are you, Janice?"

"Oh, I know," Janice replied sweetly, "but that's not exactly the way—way I would want it."

"Modern little Cinderella, eh?" Nora laughed scornfully.

Janice's face lit up. "Yes, that's an awful sweet story. It's my favorite."

Gladys looked at her suspiciously.

"Yeah," she agreed; "fairy-stories might happen to a Cinderella if she happened to have legs like yours."

Conversation lulled and the three girls retired after Nora's parting shot.

"I wish I had your figure. I'd make a darn sight more use of it than you're doing."

Janice dropped off to sleep thinking of Jimmy, and that curious little smile again formed on her childish face. . . .

The next morning Jim Nash had an early visitor. His valet woke him from a sound sleep to inform him that a very insistent young lady wished to see him immediately. Jimmy turned over wearily:

"Tell her to see my lawyer."

"But she said to tell you it wasn't about a lawsuit or money, sir."

"Huh?" he grunted stupidly. "Not about money? Impossible!" Nevertheless he got up, hastily donned his dressing-robe and went to his caller.

"Nora!" he exclaimed. "What do you want at this hour?"

"Jim," she began, "I had to come. I want to talk to you on the level."

"Well, shoot the works."

"It's about Janice. I've only known the girl for about three months, but I've roomed with her long enough to know her, and I'm telling you that Janice is still a baby, so to speak. She deserves a better break than she'll get from you."

Jim laughed heartily:

"So you're on the wagon and soap-boxing me, eh, Nora? Money satisfies any woman, doesn't it?"

"Jim," Nora continued quietly, "I've played hard, loved hard, seen my fun and taken it, but I've been on the square with my friends. What I'm telling you about Janice is straight. She doesn't know I'm up here; word of honor, she doesn't. Why, Jim, she means those little rosebuds she wears on her step-ins. They mean more to her than just pants' decorations. Get me? Why, she even believes in Cinderella and all that stuff!"

"I usually pay off, don't I?" he answered, "I'm not a piker."

"But this is different, Jim, she pleaded. "Janice is different. She's—she's virginal, fragile, can't stand the pace of Broadway. It'll break her quick and send her away, a wreck. Your money couldn't restore to her the things she would lose. It couldn't give her the home and children she ought to have."

Jim Nash got to his feet quickly.

"I'm sorry, Nora, but I frankly don't believe the things you're telling me. Not that I think you are lying, but, rather, just mistaken."

Nora left realizing that her visit had been futile.

That night Jim called for Janice early. They stepped out into his open roadster and were promptly swallowed up in the traffic. For moments they were silent. At length Jim said:

"Let's go out to my country place, where we can breathe some pure air and really see all the stars and this beautiful moon."

"Let's!" Janice agreed, childishly enthusiastic.

He slipped an arm around her and drew her closely to his side.

"We'll get along fine, baby," he replied huskily.

His country place turned out to be an estate, which seemingly awed Janice despite its complete darkness. Jim brought the car to an effortless halt.

"Honey," he whispered, "we are alone here. Nobody to bother us. Kiss me."

Janice turned a shy, timid mouth up to his and he crushed her to him. She sighed softly and watched him with wide-open eyes. At last the fervor of his kisses caused her eyes to half close. He pressed her closer and she seemed instinctly to respond and then to immediately withdraw. He looked down on her troubled face and noticed that she seemed to shiver.

"Why, Janice, what's the matter?" he said softly. "You're trembling. Are you cold?"

"I'm just a big baby," she replied jerkily, in spite of her forced smile; "I'm a little afraid. But not of you, Jimmy dear; you may kiss me all you want."

The moon cast soft light on her features, giving her the very personification of youth, its young energy and innocence. Twenty years rolled from Jim as he gazed at her. He felt like a kid again—no longer the suave man-about-town. He trembled impatiently to again draw her to his arms, to again have those warm, yet

strangely childish kisses. But her wistful little smile seemed to stop him. He sat silently for a few moments, trying to analyze his emotions and figure her out at the same time.

She turned to him again with all her youthful verve as though she had already forgotten his kisses.

"Look," she said, pointing, "there's a lake or a big pool!"

"Yes, that's my pool," he answered, the blood again rushing to his head.

"It's such a beautiful night," she replied idly.

"Let's go swimming!" he suggested suddenly. "It would be glorious on a night like this, you know."

"But we have no swimming-suits."

It was on the tip of his tongue to assure her that there were plenty of suits in the locker room, but, instead, he said:

"Let's go in the suits nature gave us."

"But—but," she stammered, "but—oh!"

"But what?" he prompted.

She hung her head shyly and did not reply. He pulled her roughly to him. She answered his ardor, kiss for kiss and he paused to look down on her questioningly:

"Baby, is this a new game, or what?"

The words seemed to sting her to the core as she slowly realized their true meaning.

"Oh!" she said, in a hurt tone. Her spirit and person seemed to wilt and emotion choked off further speech.

Jim watched her reaction, her confusion. No, it was genuine. He'd been a suspicious fool, a cad! He humbly begged her pardon and her naïve acceptance of his apology caused a lump to rise in his throat. He saw her again turn longing eyes on the pool.

"Jimmy," she plucked timidly at his arm, "I'll go swimming with you

if you want me to, the way—the way kids do,” she finished the last words in a breathless sort of fashion.

“Honey,” he said huskily, “let’s go.”

“Then, you go out there,” she said, blushing furiously, as she pointed out into the darkness, “and I’ll undress here.”

Janice folded her clothes in a neat pile and, with the unconscious grace of a wood nymph, made her way down to the edge of the pool.

“Jimmy!” she called in that immature voice of hers.

Jimmy came running to her and she modestly turned her head.

“Let’s race to the other side of the pool,” she cried and made a clean dive, which, for the moment she was suspended in the air, gave Jimmy a vision of white loveliness. With temples afire, he raced madly after her. She reached the other side and turned to cross again; then seemingly allowed him to catch her in the centre of the pool. They clung together breathlessly for a moment, and then she was away on another mad race.

At last she tired of the sport and drew herself up to rest on the curbing. He picked her up gently and walked over to the sand beach by the side of the pool; there he tenderly laid her down and sank to the sands beside her. Her voice sounded weak, and too tired to protest as his arms encircled her.

“Jimmy,” she said dreamily. . . .

Jimmy rose from the sand where Janice remained silently as he had placed her. Her eyes seemed clouded with remorse and pain. A faint tremor ran through her body and at length she moved, ignored his proffered hand and looked up at him:

“I’m all right now. Please let me go up to the car by myself.”

She walked away and smiled that queer smile when she heard the faint sounds behind which told her he was

closely following. Arriving at the car, she drew forth her pocketbook and took out a small bottle. She fumbled at the stopper and tried to raise it to her lips. A strong arm darted out and knocked it to the ground.

“Good lord, kid,” a thoroughly frightened Jimmy quavered, “does it mean that much to you?”

“You promised not to follow,” she said reproachfully. “I don’t blame you in the least for what happened, but you had no right to do what you did then.”

Jimmy thought of his talk with Nora. Lord! She had been right; he had wrecked this girl’s life! He was practically a murderer!

“Janice,” he began desperately, “I’m sorry, and I’d marry you, but I’m not free, I have a wife, and she’s coming home tomorrow. But there’s one thing I can do and that is give you a nice sum of money, enough to take care of you for a while. Here!” With this he seized his check-book, scribbled out a check and thrust it in her hands. “It’s for five thousand and if the market wasn’t so low I’d write it for more. Promise you won’t try to kill yourself again. I can’t stand it!”

Janice folded the check dully with nerveless fingers.

“Not one word have you said of love, Jimmy.”

“But——”

“Kiss me, Jimmy.”

He reached over half-heartedly, their lips met, hers clung and Jimmy gathered her savagely to him:

“Woman, what sort of a sphinx are you, anyway?”

The sun high in the heavens and beating down persistently on the open car finally awoke him. Jim Nash, no longer the Jimmy of last night, turned weary eyes on the sleeping Janice and, noticing her pocket-book, warily took possession of it and searched hastily for the check he had

written in that mad moment . . . No, it wasn't there. He'd noticed her twisting it absent-mindedly last night as though she didn't know what it was nor cared. Perhaps she had thrown it away. Anyway, he could cancel payment on it as soon as he got into town. Its size made it safe to be refused by the bank without calling him regardless.

Janice woke and seemed to recoil instinctively as she associated Jimmy with the memories of the past night. How wilted she seemed! Had he destroyed this little flower? Would she wither away as Nora had said? He shook his head slowly and was undecided about the check. If she recalled its existence what would he do?

The drive back to the city was like a funeral for her youth, lost overnight. Jimmy was thoroughly miserable as they passed the First National Bank—his bank.

Janice noticed. "My check?" she said tonelessly and vague. "Was that counterfeit too?"

Jim Nash looked deep into her suffering eyes. Her utter indifference to everything already silently accused him of the murder of this wilting girl.

"Yes, by God," he exclaimed, "it is good! Come in with me now and I'll okay it past the cashier." . . .

Gladys and Nora heard the timid knock and quickly carried the fainting Janice to the couch. They quickly disrobed her and applied cold packs to her head.

"Look," Nora said tragically, "the step-ins; the rosebuds are gone!"

Gladys picked up a little book:

"This looks like a bank-book. Whew! Five thousand deposited in her name this morning!"

Janice's eyes opened slowly. She smiled at the two.

"How did you do it?" they both

shouted. They wanted the low-down.

"The check, you mean?" she replied absently, seeing the book in their hands. "Mr. Nash gave it to me."

A knock at the door interrupted the conversation.

"Telegram for Mrs. Duncan," the messenger said.

Janice sprang up. "Oh, that's for me!" she replied, joyfully seizing it. She read it and happily started packing her clothes.

"It's from Jack, my husband," she explained naively. "You see, the police had him in a jail in Cincinnati; said he and some woman had been playing badger games or something there. They caught him, but he sent me on to this city. I've been just waiting for him to get out."

"Yeah, just five thousand dollars worth of waiting," Nora replied.

"You were playing the game with your husband? You were the decoy in the game?" Gladys asked.

"Well," Janice parried in that same small voice, "I just did what he told me to. It didn't look like a game anyway; it wasn't much fun. It seemed kind o' silly to me."

Both girls rocked with laughter: "So you're the kid from Wichita who made a sucker out of old Jim Nash!"

Janice appeared puzzled. "But I didn't make a sucker out of him. He just gave me that check and I took it."

"Well, good-by, kid; good luck to you," Nora said. "You certainly made a sucker out of me too, but you were clever."

"Don't forget me," Janice said timidly as she paused at the door, "I'll always remember both of you."

"No, we aren't liable to forget you; you, the Wichita Virgin!"

"Yeah," Nora repeated drily, "the Wichita Virgin!"

The door closed and Janice was gone. . . .

HER CHOICE

By Peggy Gaddis

SHE sat, tense and silent, pallid of face, during the age-long hours in which a jury was selected. She was scarcely conscious of the big, dingy, crowded courtroom, buzzing with voices, rustling with little noises of a large crowd of people moving about; she was achingly, terribly conscious of the figure beside her. Her brother, Bill—the boy who was more her son than her brother, despite the scant few years that separated them; Bill, for whom she had sacrificed everything that women hold dear, and for whom, his lawyer said, she must now give up the most precious thing that had ever come into her life.

On her other side sat Thorpe Grayson. Big, broad of shoulder, browned as a young Indian, steady-eyed; wanting the world to know of his love for her, his unquestioning loyalty in this great ordeal that she was facing. Bill, her brother, was on trial for murder, and Thorpe wanted the world—his world of wealth and luxury and social position, Bill's world of college boys and girls and their fathers and mothers, her own world of theatres and night clubs and radio—Thorpe wanted them all to know that he loved Lorraine and that he was solidly behind her and Bill in this ordeal.

As the two attorneys battled over the choice of jurors for the trial, Lorraine looked back a little . . . Eldon, whom Bill had killed; Eldon, whose mistress she had been for four years; Eldon's money had put Bill through

college. Hating Eldon, shrinking from his touch, she had yet given herself to him, submerging her every shrinking instinct in the need to give Bill an education.

She could almost laugh, bitterly, drearily, at the thought. Bill had had his college course, but at what a bitter cost to her! Because he had come home a day earlier than he had been expected and had found Eldon in her apartment, because he had overheard some of the things Eldon had said to her, Bill had killed Eldon.

She repeated it over to herself; but even now, weeks after that dreadful night, she could hardly make herself believe that it was true; that they were here in this crowded, dingy courtroom, to watch Bill's fight for life. She shuddered sickly and put out a gloved hand to lay it over Bill's. He turned to her swiftly, his little flashing smile beneath his frightened yet courageous eyes cutting her to the heart.

He was so young! She saw him again as she had seen him during commencement week,—young and gay, and brown,—hatless, laughing, scuffling with other boys from his own class. She caught her breath at the memory. That had been the week when she had met Thorpe,—a distinguished alumnus of the college.

She remembered that night so well! There had been a moon true to the oldest traditions of June. There had been the sound of music from the ballroom,—laughing, gay young

voices,—the faint shuffle of slippers on feet; she and Thorpe had walked across the campus to the outdoor theatre, where stone terraces rose above a natural stage-setting. They had sat there for a while. Even now she could recall the moment when Thorpe had put his arms about her, could hear the sound of his voice, a little unsteady, as he told her of his love,—could recapture, in memory, the almost stinging sweetness of his kiss.

And she, Lorraine Jordan, who had been Eldon Marshall's mistress for four years, had promised to marry Thorpe, and had dared to believe that she could marry him without letting him know about Eldon; had dared to believe that she could "get away with it." Her mouth twisted bitterly at the thought, now, in derision at the blindness of her folly.

She had come home from the little college town, and she had told Eldon the truth. And he had been nasty—very nasty. He was a brutish person, who felt that the handsome allowance he gave her, the luxurious apartment, the clothes,—all entitled him to treat her any way he liked; to force from her a response to his insatiable desire,—to possess himself not only of her body but of her soul. For Bill's sake, she had endured him; but now she told him the truth,—told him how she had hated him, even though she had forced herself to keep her part of their bargain by submitting to him.

There had been an ugly scene; Eldon had struck her—there was a great ugly welt on her cheek, and one shoulder was bruised from the pressure of his heavy hand—when Bill came into the room. She hadn't expected him until the following day. He had found her in *négligé*, Eldon in pyjamas and robe. Bill had taken in the scene: Lorraine's tears,—the welt on her cheek,—the bruised shoul-

der revealed by the torn *négligé*,—and, blind with rage, he had struck Eldon and knocked him down. Somehow, Eldon's head had struck the sharp corner of a modernistic table—the blow had been terrific—and Eldon had died.

Now twelve men and women were sitting in the jury box to decide whether or not Bill's crime had been justified; or whether Bill should pay for Eldon's worn-out, beastly rotten life, with his own clean youth and promise.

That night, after court had adjourned for the day, Bill's lawyer came to Lorraine and spoke frankly:

"There's just one 'out' as I can see it, Miss Jordan. I'm being perfectly frank," explained the lawyer. "If you will go on the stand and tell the court of your—er—relations with Eldon,—if you will tell them that you were his mistress—"

Lorraine caught her breath on a little choked, protesting cry, and the lawyer looked at her squarely.

"You were, weren't you?" he asked almost sternly, and before the look in his eyes, Lorraine could not lie.

"I— Yes!" she stammered, hanging her head; "but it was for Buddy—for Bill! I wanted him to have a decent education; I did it for him!"

The lawyer looked up, surveying her calmly. His eyes went over the almost regal loveliness of the black velvet gown that she wore, the pearls twisted carelessly about her throat; he looked at the luxurious beauty of the apartment, and he permitted himself a very faint smile as he said, with perfect courtesy: "Ah, yes, of course. I quite understand!" There was a tiny silence, and then he went on briskly: "We must reveal this to the jury,—that Eldon Marshall robbed you—against your will, remember!—of your innocence, and that, when your brother learned the truth, he

avenged your honor in the good old-fashioned way; made use of an old southern custom! You understand?"

Lorraine nodded, and the lawyer took himself off, after preparing her for the following day's ordeal. Lorraine sat on alone in the beautifully furnished living-room of the apartment for which Eldon Marshall had paid. She was looking ahead down the pathway of the future, looming dark and ugly.

She knew quite well that if she went on the stand and bared the ugly story of the past four years, she would never see Thorpe Grayson again. He would be disgusted; he would turn from her in horror and loathing. She all but cried aloud at the thought. Only now, when she was so near losing him, did she realize to the fullest extent how deeply and sincerely she loved him.

Yet if she refused to tell of her relations with Eldon Marshall— She shuddered, for she knew quite well that Bill's crime would be given as murder and that he would pay the extreme penalty.

She must give up her brother, or she must lose her lover. She could not have both. She paced the floor, wild with indecision, frantic with pain. She recalled Bill, a plump, rosy two-year-old, who followed her about like a puppy and adored her blindly and unquestioningly; Bill, growing up, as she tried to be both mother and father to him. There had been lean days, dark nights, but she and Bill had clung together, fighting the world. . . . She couldn't give Bill up,—she couldn't! Why, he was like a part of her! She must go on the stand tomorrow and tell the truth—the whole, ugly, hideous truth.

She must give Thorpe up! The thought of it twisted her heart with a blinding agony. She, who had never before known the touch of real love,

—she, who had begun really to know the meaning of life when Thorpe Grayson's arms had first gone about her and he had held her close. That moonlit night, on the stone terrace above the lake, when Thorpe had kissed her,—when she had had a fleeting thought of what it would mean to give herself to him—to belong to him as she belonged to Eldon. It had been sacrilege even to think of Eldon in the same breath with Thorpe.

She had dared to dream of happiness with Thorpe. He had said they would have to live abroad for at least the next few years, and she had felt secure in the thought that they would scarcely be likely to meet any one who would know the truth about Eldon and herself. She had been careful; Eldon had wished it. . . .

The night wore on, as she paced the floor, tortured, bewildered, flung this way and that by the necessity of making up her mind. When she dressed finally to go to the courtroom her mind was still in a turmoil. Subconsciously she chose a becoming costume; a smart suit of pale gray broadcloth, with deep cuffs of gray fox, and a scarf of jade-green and gray about her throat. Her ruddy, red-gold hair peeped from beneath the brim of a tiny gray hat that had a veil reaching almost to the tip of her impertinent nose. She was beautiful—and she was glad of it!

His eyes lit up with appreciation of the picture she made, as she sat beside him inside the little railing, at counsel's table. But she saw, by his frown, that Bill's lawyer was dissatisfied with her costume. The trial opened promptly, the first occupants of the stand being the doctor who had examined Eldon, and who testified to the way he had met his death; the elevator man at the apartment house; one or two others. And then, without preamble, Bill's lawyer stood up.

"I'd like to call Miss Lorraine Jordan to the stand!" he said quietly, and it seemed to Lorraine that, for a moment, the earth whirled beneath her feet and there was a mist before her eyes.

The moment had come. The moment in which she must make her decision. She must give up Bill, or she must lose Thorpe. As she went towards the witness stand, her knees trembling beneath her, she was as far from a decision as she had been last night, when the lawyer had first warned her that this moment must come.

She took the oath in a voice that was all but inaudible. She almost collapsed in the witness chair, and when the lawyer spoke to her, his voice was gentle and soothing:

"How long, Miss Jordan, had you known Mr. Marshall?"

"Five years!"

"And what were your relations with him?"

It had come—that question that she must answer,—the question that would, once and for all, give her either her brother or her lover, but could never give her both.

She looked up, and her eyes fell upon Bill, sitting a little tense at the counsel table, watching her, his hands gripping the arms of his chair, his eyes wide and a little afraid. Dear Bill! Her Bill! But for her, he would be young and gay and boisterous, going his way, happy and carefree.

Her eyes swung to Thorpe, who sat beside Bill. Thorpe smiled at her, hearteningly. He made a little movement with his lips, as though he were kissing her, and she saw in his eyes his perfect faith in her, his complete trust, his love!

She lifted her head a little, so that her eyes were fixed on space, and she said, levelly, quietly, yet in a voice that was perfectly audible:

"I was Eldon Marshall's mistress!"

It seemed to her that the words hung, quivering, on the still air for a long moment. It seemed to her that ages passed, before the next question came.

"Did your brother know of this?" asked the lawyer gently.

"No!" the answer came sharply now, swiftly. "No; he never dreamed——"

"Suppose you tell us, Miss Jordan, in your own words, just how you came to this relationship with Eldon Marshall!" suggested the lawyer.

"I object, your honor, to this form of questioning!" protested the prosecuting attorney.

"Objection overruled. Proceed with the examination, Mr. Kelley!" said his honor.

The lawyer signaled to Lorraine, and she began quietly:

"Bill and I were orphans! We had rather a difficult time of it until, when I was eighteen, I got a job in a show. I liked the work; it paid well, and I was able to put Bill in school. For two years everything went well. I was happy; Bill was well taken care of and making splendid record in school. And then I met Mr. Marshall at a party after the theatre. He—he liked me, and wanted me to live with him, but I disliked him. He was repulsive to me, and I—let him see that. It made him angry, and he caused me to lose my job."

Her clear, soft voice gained strength as she went on, but she did not look up. Her eyes were on the silver-and-jade clasp of the gray suède bag in her lap, as though she found it of vast interest.

"I found another position, not quite as good as the first, but Mr. Marshall caused me to lose that one, too. I found that he was not only very rich, but influential. For a year he hounded me, causing me to lose one position

after another. I became desperate, for I had no more money to keep Bill in school. Only two or three more years and I knew my brother would be in a position where he could make a fine future for himself. I couldn't bear to have him leave school. So, finally, when there was nothing else left, I accepted Mr. Marshall's—proposition!"

There was a little rustling stir in the courtroom, and his honor sternly ordered silence.

"Your brother knew nothing of this?" asked the lawyer.

"Nothing. He thought that I was doing radio work, and that was why I was able to send him so much more money."

The questioning went on, adroit, smooth, clever, until the entire story, concluding with the scene of the quarrel, Marshall's attack, and Bill's entrance, had been brought out. Despite the most bitter cross-examination, her story did not waver in the least. She had told the truth; she was unafraid of cross-examination.

It was over at last, and the lawyer helped her from the stand. Still with her eyes downcast, she stumbled towards the table, and was surprised when an arm went about her and somebody supported her to the chair.

"Buck up, darling, it's all over now!" whispered Thorpe in her ear.

She all but fainted at the sound of his voice, tender, gentle, adoring. Almost, she thought, dazedly, admiring. She turned her head and saw him lean, handsome brown face very near her own, and he was smiling at her, tenderly, encouragingly. She caught her breath and clung to his hand, fighting with all her strength against the almost overwhelming sense of shock and bewilderment that swept over her.

Bill sat, turned a little away from her, until he was called to the stand.

His examination was brief, but when he came back to the chair beside her, he was interested in his lawyer's summing up of the case, and did not look at his sister. . . .

Just as darkness was settling over the face of the earth, the jury brought in its verdict and, dazedly, Lorraine realized that Bill had been acquitted—that he was free! His crime had been judged one of vengeance; he had avenged his sister's honor—and he was free.

Together, she and Thorpe and Bill, a little later, went down the crowded steps of the courthouse and into a waiting car. As they settled themselves and the car began to thread its way through the curious crowd, Thorpe put his arm about her.

"You were superb, darling!" he told her warmly. "It was perjury, of course, but you almost made me believe it! No wonder the jury fell for it! I'm proud of you, dear; it was a brave and splendid thing to do, and it saved Bill!"

Stunned, Lorraine realized that Thorpe thought she had lied on the stand. He had not believed her shame and disgrace, the sordid ugliness of it! Her heart rose in her breast, and she trembled with happiness at the thought that she had not had to sacrifice either her brother or her lover. And then, as Thorpe held her close, she looked across his shoulder, and met Bill's eyes for a long, accusing moment. Bill's face was gray and set, his eyes were bleak and sick with shame, and, after a moment, he turned away from her in loathing.

Her heart sank. Then, she *had* been right; she had had to make a choice between her brother and her lover. She had made her decision; she had saved her brother's life, she had kept her lover; but, after all, she had lost Bill. His cold, set face and bleak eyes told her that.

ONE HOT STORY

By Bert Murray Fliegman

THE city editor of the *Baltimore Graphic* was in a rotten mood as Bill Reynolds, star reporter, came swaggering through the city room under a nice load of alcoholic refreshment.

"All your worries are over," remarked Bill, as he tossed his battered hat on the city editor's desk. "I'm here. Start the presses."

"Oh, so you're here, are you?" rasped the city ed. "Well, well, well! Good afternoon, Mr. Reynolds. How do you feel today? Hope you had a pleasant sleep this morning."

"How'd you guess?" asked Bill, smiling sweetly.

"My intuition," snarled Hank Bane. "What the hell do you think this is? A nursery?"

Bill glanced about the huge room, with its clacking typewriters, coatless men, and its suggestion of restrained movement.

"That's a new angle!" he said. "Never noticed it before."

The city editor made a noise like a wounded bear and pointed an accusing finger at the good-looking young man before him.

"Listen to me, Reynolds," he growled. "This shack isn't a nursery, but it's going to be one if we don't get a real yarn and get it soon. This rag hasn't had a snappy front-page story in weeks. All we've been featuring for a month is the weather, and the rest of the features are lousy. Get me? Lousy! The circulation department is sitting on the managing

editor's neck, the managing editor is sitting on mine, and——"

"And now," pointed out Bill, "you're sitting on mine. What a situation!"

"Yes, I'm sitting on yours," Bane agreed grimly, "with a vengeance!" His tone became more gentle: "Listen, Bill. We've been friends a heluva long time, haven't we?"

"Uh-huh," said Bill.

"Then, how about a little coöperation? Go out and get a story, or we'll both be out of a couple of jobs. I'll tell you what," Bane dropped his voice until it was barely audible above the rat-tat-tat of the typewriters; "I'll give you a five-dollar raise for just one hot story. How's that sound to you? Just one corking, sizzling yarn and the fin is yours!"

Bill cocked an eye at him.

"So!" he smiled. "Trying to buy me with your filthy shekels! Buying my pure and only slightly alcoholic soul to satisfy your scandalmongering instinct for hot, juicy news!" Reynolds became thoughtful. "Just the same," he added, "five bucks'll bring one extra quart of balm for the soul."

"Bane," he said to the city editor, "you may be the world to your mother, but you're just the bane of my existence to me."

"Your puns," remarked Bane with a grimace, "are as rotten as your liquor. All I want is a nice, hot story. Go out and shoot somebody,—wreck

a train,—hold a communist demonstration,—do anything, only get us some good copy. What do you say?"

"I say, you're on!" snapped the star reporter. "I'll take you up on that. I'll get you a story that'll stop the presses. Hold everything till I get back, you soulless, keyhole-peekin' ghoul, and I'll show you something your lascivious eyes have never seen before. And don't say I didn't warn you!" He reached for his battered chapeau. "I'll be seein' you." His hat set at a rakish angle, Bill Reynolds ambled out of the building.

The city editor glanced after him and shook his head in wonder.

"Damned if I don't believe him!" he muttered. . . .

Once outside, Bill looked up at the blue heavens and decided there wasn't a story in town. It was too nice a day for anything to happen.

"There goes the five-buck raise," he mused. "And I could have used that extra quart."

He promptly forgot all about his pleading city editor, forgot that he had quite a reputation as the star reporter of the *Graphic*, and became intent on pleasure. Whereupon, he swaggered leisurely up the street, with an eye to the ladies. At Charles Street he ogled a pretty blonde and came to a definite decision.

"Baltimore," he soliloquized, addressing the back of the pretty blonde, "has beautiful women."

He continued his walk slowly. Since there was no place to go, he decided there was no need for speed. Finally, he paused before the glittering front of the Palais D'Or.

"A little chink food, Bill," he suggested to himself. "It'll do you good after last night. How about it?"

He agreed with himself and walked upstairs. He handed his nondescript hat to the checkroom girl and smiled a beatific smile.

"Nice day, isn't it?" he said.

"Is it?" she asked coyly.

"Don't ask me, baby," said Bill, "I haven't been out yet." And with that, he allowed himself to be led to a table by a tuxedo'd Chinese.

"Chow mein," he told the waiter, after much thought. Then, having settled so momentous a matter, he let his eyes wander about the dimly lit interior. At each table a tiny lamp threw its glow upon the occupants, lending to them a mellow softness. The place was hung in silks and satins, multi-colored and refreshing to the eye. An exotic perfume hung over everything, giving the Palais D'Or, with its draperies, soft lights, and pattering, slant-eyed waiters, a touch of the Far East. In a corner a six-piece orchestra was preparing to play again.

Bill nodded in satisfaction and settled back in his seat. This was nice, he decided, particularly after last night. Her husband had come home an hour too soon, and Bill had had to dive out the back door. A narrow escape, of course; but a miss was as good as a mile. However, it had left him shaken; whereupon he immediately hit the bottle,—with the result that he had awakened at one o'clock of the afternoon, five hours late for work. Then, what with Bane riding him for—

Bill stopped thinking. His eyes had suddenly met those of a chic little thing in the booth opposite. She was lovely, Bill decided, with that loveliness that is piquant and fresh. He liked that type. Yet there was something about her, he observed, that suggested that she knew what it was all about. She wasn't he saw, the kind you could kid.

"Shall I give the little girl a break and smile?" Bill wondered to himself.

He smiled. Somewhat to his sur-

prise, she smiled in return. Bill Reynolds was not one to neglect an opportunity. He immediately rose, told the waiter to bring his food to the adjoining table, and sat down opposite the woman.

"Hello," said he.

"Hello," said she.

"My name," said Bill Reynolds, "is Bill Reynolds."

The woman hesitated momentarily, as though considering the wisdom of entrusting her name to a stranger.

"And mine," she said, "is Wanda Samson."

"You're not, by any chance," said Bill, raising wondering eyebrows, "any relation to the Samson of Samson and Delilah?"

She laughed, and to Bill's seasoned ears, it was genuine music. He liked her lips. They were very red, he saw. And her eyes,—he liked them too. They were blue, with a blueness that was deep and unfathomable. Bill found that it was easy to speak to her. In fact, he enjoyed it. And his own engaging personality and good looks made it easier. In five minutes they were old friends.

The orchestra came to life just as Bill's chow mein put in an appearance. Bill often wondered why food was brought in just as you started to dance. Perhaps, thought Bill, he was always dancing.

He took the gorgeous little creature in his arms and swung her out on the floor. The soft glow of the many-colored lights caressed her face and lent a halo to her hair. Bill gasped as he drank in her beauty. And could she dance! He found himself floating on air.

"Heaven," sighed Bill Reynolds, "was never like this!"

"And you," her voice was a brook babbling over tiny pebbles, "you dance divinely."

For an incongruous moment he

thought of Hank Bane swearing over his copy, and wondered what he would do and say if he could see him now.

"Perish the thought!" shuddered Bill, closing his mind to the scene. "This is no place for homicidal day-dreams."

The music came to an end all too soon, and Bill guided his companion to her seat. He no longer felt hungry, but he ate anyway. His eyes continued to play over the vision opposite him. Her rounded curves intrigued him. He had noticed her ankles as they had gone out to dance, and to Bill's experienced gaze, they were perfect. Beneath their little table, her knees touched his, and the contact sent a tiny shiver up his spine. She was lovely beyond the mere connotation of the word.

"I thought a little while ago," remarked Bill, addressing her, "that Baltimore boasted beautiful women." His eyes found hers. "Now," he said, "I know it for an irrevocable certainty."

"Beware the flatterer," she said, her face coloring.

His fingers touched hers.

"I mean it," he said earnestly, "now, if ever."

By the time they were ready to leave, Bill was completely fascinated by her. And when Wanda suggested he come to her apartment for a drink or two, his delight knew no bounds.

"Wanda," he said fervently, "you're a woman after my own heart."

"Maybe," she suggested enigmatically, "I am."

"Am what?" queried Bill.

"After your own heart," she replied, smiling upon him.

"Well, if you are," announced Bill, "you're sure on the right road to getting it!"

She rose and he helped her with her wrap. They walked to the exit.

"Nice day, isn't it?" asked the checkroom girl, handing him his battered headgear and an unmistakable wink.

"Is it?" Bill wondered, and slipped her a quarter. Then, taking Wanda's arm, he led her from the place.

"Where do we go from here?" asked Bill. She indicated a long, racy roadster and they got in.

"Not very far," she smiled. "I live out in Druid Hill. Ever been there?"

That was a funny one! Had he ever been there! As a reporter, he knew every nook and cranny, and every crooked alley in the city.

"Oh, once or twice," said Bill easily. He didn't want to tell her he was a reporter. It might spoil things. He had mentioned, casually, that he was a writer, and let it go at that.

The car sped past the reservoir and finally drew up before a handsome apartment building. A canopy stretched across the sidewalk, and a gorgeously bedecked doorman opened the door for them. Bill whistled.

"Do you mean to tell me you live here all by your little lonesome?" he asked.

She nodded her small head.

"All by my little lonesome," she repeated. "But it's such a tiny place—my apartment—so cozy, that I don't mind it."

They passed through a glittering lobby, in the centre of which a fountain splashed and within which goldfish sported. They took the elevator to the third floor. She led him to her door, opened it, and let him in.

"Welcome," she said, "to Druid Hill Manor!"

Bill glanced about him and gave vent to another whistle. If this shack was small, he was a Mongolian! Done in colonial fashion, and ultra-smart, the apartment was vast. Huge chairs stood about, a huge golden-brown rug covered the floor, and huge oils em-

bellished the walls. Everything was huge. But it was all beautifully done and must have cost a goodly penny. A couple of baby grand pianos stood upon a raised dais in a far corner.

"How do you like it?" Wanda asked carelessly.

"Scrumptious!" said Bill. "But tell me, what's the idea of the two pianos?"

"Oh, that," she replied, as if it were nothing at all. "Why, sometimes my sister and I play together. Duets, you know."

"There can't be two of you!" said Bill. "What a family!" Well, it sure was a swell dump. He dropped into an easy-chair and sighed. "This," he approved, "is comfort."

"Make yourself at home," she smiled, "while I mix a few drinks."

Bill glanced at her in delight.

"You never spoke kinder words," he declared fervidly. "Shall I help?" She shook her head.

"No, you rest and let me do the entertaining. You're my guest, you know."

"That's right, too," said Bill, perfectly willing. "All right, I'll wait; but don't be long."

"I won't," she assured him, and went into the kitchenette. Soon there came pleasant sounds of cracked ice being vigorously rattled in a shaker, and Bill sighed in heavenly enjoyment.

"This is life," he muttered, "life at its fullest." He stood up and glanced in the full-length mirror opposite him. "The thing in a nutshell is this," he addressed the reflection in the glass; "you're getting so that women fall for you right off the bat. It's becoming too easy, and that takes the joy out of life. You see, Bill," he told himself confidentially, "you're so darned good-looking that making them fall for you is the simplest thing in the world. Personality, my boy,

and goods looks—what a combination! Beware!”

“What in the world are you talking about?” Wanda had entered the room bearing a tiny tray laden with drinks.

Bill flushed, and pretended to straighten his tie.

“That,” said Bill, “was the soliloquy from Hamlet. You know. Ha-ha!” He laughed wanly.

“Well, have a drink, and maybe it won’t trouble you any more.”

“Sure thing!” He was glad to get off so easily. “Here’s to the most beautiful girl in all the world!” He held up his glass to her and they drank. The liquid flowed down his throat and nestled somewhere in the region of the solar plexus. The stuff was excellent. How about another?

As though she had read his thoughts, Wanda filled their glasses again. She held hers up and made a toast:

“Here’s to the man who invented nice things to say: Mr. Bill Reynolds!”

Bill bowed in mock appreciation, and they drank. This time the drink hit him in the vicinity of the brain. He was beginning to feel good already.

“How about another?” asked Bill hopefully. “One more like that, and we’ll be in a pre-war state.”

“I’m game,” she said, and poured. The drinks disappeared again, and with them all Bill’s troubles. Life had begun to take on a new meaning. He saw things through a glow. When he spoke, his voice seemed to come from a great distance, and he felt lackadaisical, mellow, warm. He wagged a finger at Wanda.

“Come here, beautiful,” he said, “and sit on papa’s lap.”

But she had vanished into another room. In another moment, she returned, wearing the sheerest of *négligés*. Bill gasped. Could he be having

a pipe-dream? Was this vision before him real, or had the drinks been a bit too much for him?

He ran his hand before his eyes and looked again. She was still there, smiling at him. The *négligé* outlined her body in all its seductive slenderness. Her figure curved maddeningly down to her tiny, spiked sandals. Her eyes, deep blue and unfathomable, were lustrous now, and pregnant with meaning. She wore no stockings, and a hint of her smooth, flawless skin peeped through for Bill to see.

He saw. He conquered—and was conquered. He sprang up and pulled her roughly into his arms. His lips found hers, moist and yielding, and he tasted heaven. Her eyes, half-closed, burned into his.

“Come,” she said, and her voice was a little husky, strange. “You haven’t seen the apartment yet.”

Exactly one-and-a-half hours later, Bill decided he wanted another drink. His throat felt parched, and his lips still burned from the woman’s kisses. He went into the other room and commenced to help himself. Just at that moment, things began to happen. There was the sound of a key turning in the lock, and the next instant a short, puffy little man appeared on the threshold and entered the apartment.

“Well, look who’s here!” exclaimed Bill, tossing down his drink and eyeing the other smilingly. “Haven’t you got the wrong number, mister?”

The little man puffed himself up and glared at the young man.

“What are you doing, sir, in my wife’s apartment?” he demanded angrily.

“Your who—?” asked Bill, astonishment spreading visible over his countenance. At that moment, Wanda emerged from the bedroom. The little man’s face became livid.

"So!" he exclaimed, gesturing wildly, "I find you here—undressed—with this man!"

Bill was too bewildered to do anything. Even his native quick-wittedness failed him. For a moment he had the peculiar sensation of being an actor in one of those my-God-my-husband affairs. Then he turned angrily on the woman:

"Is this your husband?" he demanded.

She nodded wearily, winding her *négligé* more closely about her trim figure.

"Then, why didn't you tell me you had a ball and chain," he asked bitterly, "instead of getting me into a mess like this?"

"What was the use?" shrugged the woman. "I didn't expect him home."

"They never do!" muttered Bill.

She turned on the little man.

"What do you mean by telling me you were going out of town and then breaking in like this?"

Her husband eyed her malevolently.

"I expected something like this, Mrs. Littleton," he replied savagely, "so I merely waited for an auspicious moment to walk in."

Bill turned to her.

"You told me your name was Samson," he challenged; "I suppose you lied about that too!"

"Of course she did," declared her husband. "My name is T. Ingraham Littleton. She bears my name."

Bill whistled.

"Not T. Ingraham Littleton, the banker?"

T. Ingraham nodded, and a grim look appeared in his eyes. He reached into his pocket and brought out a squat, wicked-appearing automatic, aimed it at Bill.

"Young man," began T. Ingraham, "I am going to teach my wife a lesson by killing you!"

"But why me?" demanded Bill,

glancing longingly at the door. His mind was performing some mental gymnastics on how long it would take to reach it. He moved behind the centre table and watched the banker. He would have to stall for time.

"Yes, you!" declared T. Ingraham savagely. He glanced at his wife, whose eyes were glued to the young man's face.

Perspiration stood out on Bill's forehead. Getting embroiled with other wives' husbands, was becoming a habit with him.

"But think of your reputation," he declared earnestly. "Think what would happen if the papers were to get hold of this!"

T. Ingraham laughed grimly.

"Young man," he said, the automatic still menacing Bill, "when you occupy my position in the community, you don't have to worry what the papers will say, because they don't dare say anything! I can buy and sell every one of them!"

"Says you!" muttered Bill indiscreetly.

"What's that?" demanded the banker.

"I said, that's true," replied Bill, still eyeing the door with an unholy longing. How in the world was he going to get to it?

The problem was solved for him. Just then the woman commenced to speak, and for an instant the banker's eyes wavered from their mark. With a fervid prayer on his lips, Bill made a dash for it. He had just reached the door when two shots rang out, splintering the woodwork above him. The next instant Bill was through the aperture and hot-footing it for the street. He didn't wait for the elevator. From behind him came sounds of pursuit and the pleading cry of a woman. Down the stairs went Bill, three at a time, catapulting out to the

sidewalk. He glanced wildly up and down for a taxi. There was none in sight.

Bill didn't stop to think; that wasn't his method. He acted. The long, racy roadster belonging to the woman was still parked at the curb. The next moment he had opened wide the throttle and was speeding at sixty miles an hour toward the centre of town. He tore down side streets at a breakneck pace, finally screeching to a stop a block from the *Graphic* offices. If they found that car, Bill didn't want it too close for comfort.

Into the building he went, consulting the large clock in the lobby as he passed.

"Faster!" he commanded the elevator boy, nudging him. "Get this crate moving!" The edition was nearing deadline.

He shot out of the lift and ran to his desk. The swagger had left him entirely. He was action personified.

"Boy," he shouted, "get me some paper!"

His typewriter began to clack furiously until the sound was one monotonous whir. His fingers flew over the keys with astonishing speed. He didn't bother to make carbon copies, as the rule rigidly insisted. It would take too much time.

Suddenly he straightened and touched his head. He had forgotten his hat in that mad exit from the Littleton apartment. Well, let them keep it to remember him by. He turned to the city editor:

"Hey, Bane!"

The other glanced across at him curiously.

"What's on your mind?"

"Got a story," shouted Bill. "How much time to deadline?"

The city editor smiled sardonically.

"Too late, big boy," he growled. "everything's bottled up and gone to press."

Bill laughed grimly to himself. With a last, desperate burst of speed, he finished his story and plucked the sheets from the desk.

"I told you I'd stop the presses," shouted Bill. He tossed the copy on the city editor's desk. "Take a look at that, you scandal hound, and tell me what you think! And thanks for the five-dollar raise!"

Bane smiled sarcastically and picked up the story. The next moment he had shot out of his chair and was picking up the phone.

"Gimme the composing room," he shouted into the transmitter. He turned to Bill. "Is all this on the level?" he asked sternly.

"For two cents," declared Bill, "I'd bust you one!"

Bane smiled happily and barked into the phone:

"Hello, Snyder? . . . Take a new head. . . . I know they have, you blankety-blank blank! . . . Stop the presses anyway! . . . I'm not drunk, I tell you! . . . Yeah, I want a banner head, swing it clear across the top. . . . Cut out the two columns about the weather and that fake countess and toss them out the window! . . . Here it is. . . . Millionaire banker raids wife's love-nest. . . . Got it? . . . T. Ingraham Littleton, eminent banker, discovers spouse partly clad in arms of handsome paramour; fires two shots. . . . I'm sending the copy down pronto. . . . That ought to wake you and your bunch up, hey? You've been snoozing long enough. . . . So are you!" Bane slammed down the receiver and turned to Bill.

"That's what I call a story," declared the city editor affectionately. "And what a scoop! We'll be the only rag in town to have it. The five dollars are yours, Bill, and we'll see about getting you a little bonus. You came through like a major!"

"Thanks for the flowers." The star

reporter looked at his friend and sighed. "How you can print such lousy stuff is beyond me. Did you ever stop to think how many people such a story can ruin? A lot you care!" He laughed shortly. "One of these days I'm going to give the whole bunch of you the air and hike it for a sheet that doesn't reek with human gore. You and the managing editor and that pest in the circulation department ought to go jump in the river. All you ever want is a lot of rotten, licentious boudoir scenes, with all the details thrown in for good measure." Bill was waxing eloquent.

The city editor recognized the symptoms.

"What you need," interrupted Bane, smiling, "is a drink."

Bill pricked up his ears.

"Now," he declared, "you're talking my language!"

It was some time after, over an excellent bottle of pre-war Scotch in the little speakeasy around the corner, that Hank Bane voiced an opinion.

"You'll have to admit, Bill," he ventured, "that meeting this Littleton dame and getting into an affair with her was a great piece of luck. You really are a lucky dog, you know."

Bill eyed him disdainfully.

"Luck, hell!" he snorted. "I knew. who it was all the time!"



LAMENTATIONS OF A CASTAWAY

By G. A. A.

Nothing to see but the splash of the moon
On the shimmering waves of the lazy lagoon;
Nothing to watch but the stars in the sky
And the fleecy-edged white of the clouds drifting by;
Nothing to hear but the sounds of the night—
Nothing but shadow, and quietness, and light.
Gosh, what a life! . . . What I'd give to be able
To see that new picture with Garbo and Gable!

DAUGHTER OF THE HORSE-LEECH

By Belle Beatty

SILENCE, thick and soft like plush, was all around him. He let himself in with the key he had made. He closed the door without even a click of the latch. Now he moved, pussy-footed, across the little entrance-hall towards the living-room, where the safe was.

He held his breath, his muscles drawn tense all over his body. His hands moved nervously, doubling into fists and then spreading out fanwise. He was sweating. He was cold, but sweating. Trickles of icy perspiration ran down the hollow of his back, under his clothes.

An honest man. An honest young workman, with a business of his own,—and he had come there to steal. He had doped out a perfect plan. He knew he could get away with it. But he sweated and held his breath and felt sick at his stomach over it, for he had never expected to do anything like that.

But Sophie—Sophie, his little girl wife, nineteen years old, lovely as a flower, greedy as a jackdaw and just as acquisitive, was growing away from him. He was losing her. Unless he could give her things, he was afraid he would lose her.

"Jerree,—new fur coat for Sophie this winter? Jerree? Please, Jerree? Jus' one little bittie new fur coat for Sophie?"

Such a darling, his Sophie! So lovely to look at. Sometimes he could hardly believe his luck in getting a girl like Sophie to marry him. A girl

who looked like that could have anybody in the world. She could have made a fortune in the movies. But she had married him!

Yes, she had taken him,—just a hard-working young fellow who managed to get a struggling little business of his own, with his name on the sign over the door. *J. L. Dunham. Locksmith. Keys Made and Fitted. Work Guaranteed.*

Wonderful, it seemed to him to have that tiny shop of his own. Wonderful beyond his dreams when lovely Sophie said she would marry him, and they found a little three-room apartment and set up housekeeping.

Sophie had worked in a beauty parlor. She hated it,—but she hated keeping house, too. She wanted to be rich, to have money for beautiful expensive clothes, servants, a car with a chauffeur, trips abroad.

"Jerree,—couldn't Sophie have just one little fur coat this winter? Jerree—"

"Honey lamb, I don't know!"

Business was punk. There wasn't a cent to spare. It was almost beyond belief how business fell off and continued to fall off. If he could only keep going till things picked up. Lately, he had begun to wonder hopelessly if things ever would pick up.

"How much would a fur coat cost, baby?" he asked.

She pouted at him, pursing up her red lips. "Sophie doesn't want any ole cheap coat!" she said. She drew a line down his nose with the tip of

her finger (she was sitting in his lap) and she leaned close and gave him a kiss with lips that always made him think of rose-petals.

"Sophie wants a booful expensive fur coat!" she said. "Make every-turn around and look at her!"

"Gosh, baby! I guess you ought to married a rich man!" he said.

"No!" she told him, her arms round his shoulder, rocking back and forth. "Don't want rich mans! Just want good ole Jerree! Booful ole Jerree! Going to buy his Sophie a booful fur coat!"

Nicholas Minnetti came into the shop one day just at closing time.

"Fancy-looking guy, all right!" Jerry thought, as he went forward to wait on him. "Big bootlegger, I bet! Gangster, maybe! Or gunman!"

"Yes, sir?" he said politely, standing behind the small show-case where he had his locks laid out neatly.

The customer peered at him with dark eyes under heavy fat-looking lids. He was a short heavy man, with spats and a stick; a white silk muffler was pulled up round his throat, and he wore a tight, dark blue overcoat that had a velvet collar. There were gray gloves, a gray felt hat, and when he took off his glove, there was a ring to be seen. Some ring, Jerry thought. A square diamond, about the size of a yeast cake. Must tell Sophie about that ring, he thought.

"You the head guy here?" the man inquired. Jerry nodded.

"Well, I got a job to be done! It's kind of a confidential job, see? You look like a guy could keep his mouth shut!"

"Yeah!" Jerry said.

"Well, that's what I thought. I got a safe, see, and I want the combination changed. I want a brand-new combination. Nobody but me to know it, see? How about it?"

"I can do it," Jerry said.

"Good! How about coming over now? Just closing, ain't you? I'll run you over in my car." . . .

Sophie didn't like Nick Minnetti. She said he made her shudder. She came along to walk home with Jerry just as they were starting out, and Minnetti politely suggested driving her home in his car. They left her at the apartment and Jerry went on to do his job.

Jerry told Sophie about Minnetti's place afterwards: "Gee, there were rugs you sink in up to your ankles! Swell draperies at the doors and windows,—velvet. Grand piano, electric. Lots of this Chinese-looking stuff; lacquer, I guess, you call it. And listen, baby,—that safe was full of money!" Sophie drew in her breath and made a flapping motion with her hand. "Yeah! Full of money! Never thought there was that much money in the world!"

"What for? What'd he have it for?"

"Dunno! He said, 'In my business I have to settle quick, and for cash. It ain't convenient for me to be writing checks.' Well, I'd rather it was him than me! I wouldn't have all that money lying around for anything in the world!"

"He was horrid!" Sophie said with a fastidious wrinkling of her nose. "All dressed up! Kind of oily, he looked!"

But it upset her to hear about all that money.

"Don't see why folks like that have to have money, and none for us!" she grumbled. "Why can't you do some of those things they do,—Jerry?"

Then a day or two afterwards:

"Jerry, am I going to get that fur coat?" she asked. Her voice sounded different, sharper. She had given up her baby talk. "Jerry, I want to know! Am I going to get it?"

"Baby—" he said helplessly. "Baby,

I don't know! If I possibly can, you will! If I can't,—why, that's all there is to it."

"All the big promises you made to me before we were married!" she said bitterly. "All you were going to do for me!"

"Well, look, baby, you got a lot at that! Nice little home, and everything in it paid for. You don't have to work the way some women do! You got a lot compared to—well, compared to what you did have!"

"Throw that up to me!" she cried. "I was poor all right! But I didn't have to stay poor. I could have married a rich man; I know I could. I could have gone to Hollywood and maybe made a fortune. But you just swept me off my feet! You chased me to death! You didn't give me time to think! First thing I knew, here I was married to you, and tied down to—to this!" she made a disdainful gesture of her hand towards the pretty living-room that Jerry thought was swell.

He looked at her with a stricken face. "Baby, you don't regret it, do you?" he asked humbly. "You ain't trying to tell me you wish you hadn't married me!"

"A woman wants things, Jerry!" she said plaintively. "Beautiful clothes, and a few good rings, and a lovely place to live! A woman wants things! Needs them! Got to have them—to be happy!"

He listened, nodding his head. True enough. Anybody as beautiful as Sophie ought to have things! She ought to have them.

"I'm going to spend the night with Dot," she told him pettishly and packed her little overnight bag and went off. Dot was her pal of the beauty-parlor days.

The silence after she had gone was appalling. It was the first time they had been apart since their marriage.

Jerry went to bed and lay awake staring at the ceiling. No golden head on the other pillow. No slender Sophie lying there beside him,—a wonder and a miracle of loveliness. Suppose she shouldn't come back! Suppose he should lose her! He sprang out of bed and walked the floor. Life without Sophie—why, Sophie was life to him! She was worth anything. Nothing would be too much to do for her. He ran his hands through his hair. He tramped up and down in his bare feet. He sat by the window and pondered. If Sophie wanted things, she should have them. . . .

So now there he stood in Nicholas Minnetti's apartment, with his hands prickling, and rivulets of sweat running down his body, and he was going to open Nick Minnetti's safe and take some money. All that money, in bundles, in bales, in heaps, and some just crumpled up and stuffed in. He was going to steal money. Honest Jerry Dunham was going to make a thief out of himself for Sophie,—lovely little Sophie, who wanted a soft, rich, awfully expensive fur coat that would make everybody turn around and look at her.

It hurt him to breathe. His throat felt closed up. Queer, you read about people doing things like this. You thought of them as thieves. You didn't stop to think that they were real people just like you, desperate, staking everything, their future, their whole existence on the chance of getting some money,—people who had to have money, had to,—had to,—*had to!*

There was money in that safe that'd buy things for Sophie. The fur coat she wanted; a ring to replace that big blue-glass ring she was wearing. She had come home from Dot's wearing that ring.

"Look, Jerry!" she cried, flaunting

it before his eyes. "If I can't have real ones, I can have the other kind! Look! You'd think it was real, wouldn't you?"

"No, I wouldn't!" he told her. "Not as big and as blue as that!"

"But isn't it pretty?" she cried. "Look, there's a star in it!"

"Junk!" he said derisively.

He'd buy her a good ring, and she could throw the junk away. And he'd get her the coat she wanted. Feverishly, he decided he would take enough to buy her whatever she wanted . . . Only today she had told him coldly as he was leaving for the shop that she was going to spend the night with Dot again.

There was fear in his heart as he thought that the time might come when she would leave him,—when all the nights without her would be lonely horrors to be got through in agony and loss.

That morning he had telephoned Nick Minnetti, pretended he wanted to see him. He had a new idea for a combination, he said, something new and entirely different. When could he see Nick?

"Well, not today!" Nick said in the voice that sounded just the way he looked, fat and oily. "I got to go to Stamford on a job today. Be back late this afternoon, but then I got a job to do here. Maybe tomorra?"

He was safe enough. The big apartment building was practically deserted at that time of day. He walked upstairs. He would walk down.

Nick Minnetti did not know how much money he had in that safe. "Sometimes more, sometimes less!" he had said when Jerry asked him. If he took some here and there, a couple of twenties out of one bundle, and two or three fifties out of another, and a handful or tens here and there, and a bunch of fives and some

ones and twos, no one would ever know that anything had been taken. Money. Money for Sophie, that was what he wanted.

He moved off the thick rug in the hall, stepped like a cat into the living-room. He brushed the velvet drapery at the door, and there was a soft swish and a tiny tinkle as the rings slid along the rod.

Some one spoke. Some one said: "Nick? That you, Nick?" in a soft voice, sleepy, dreamy. A woman! Nick had a woman there then! Well,—that was something—something he hadn't reckoned on. . . .

"Nick! That you?" the sleepy voice said again. She must be lying on the davenport that was drawn up before the fireplace, with its back to the room. Cautiously, Jerry began to step backwards towards the door. He'd have a nice time explaining to Nick's woman how he happened to walk in with a key and all, wouldn't he? His eyes on the back of the huge davenport, he moved stealthily backwards.

An arm came up over the high back of the davenport, stretching itself upward,—a slim young arm, and a hand, small and white and smooth. A little young hand with a ring on it, a huge square blue stone set in silver—a ring just like the junk ring that Sophie had shown him. On the slender, almost bony young wrist there was a bracelet that was just like a bracelet Sophie had, too! Jerry had given her that bracelet.

He felt a frightful pain in his heart, in his head, in his throat and then all over his body. He thought:

"This is how death'll be when it comes——"

Then he took three long steps forward, around the end of the divan and looked down at Sophie, his little girl wife,—Sophie, lying there on Nick Minnetti's divan, waiting for Nick

Minnetti to come home! Blue velvet pyjamas she had on, and a little gold brocade coat. Gold brocade slippers on her feet.

"Jer—Jerry!" she said, and she gasped, her mouth open, trembling. She sat up. She put both her hands to her throat, staring at him. There was a tiny flicker of fire in the fireplace and the big blue stone on her hand caught the light and gave it back in brilliant rays and sparkles. He saw now that the ring wasn't junk. It was a priceless thing,—must have cost a fortune.

Like a cat, she moved herself off the divan, around the corner of it, putting it between herself and the man who looked at her with such dreadful eyes. And as she moved, he followed her, step by step.

She whimpered a little. "You're going to—kill me, Jerry!" she quavered. "D—don't—d'don't k-kill me,—Jerry!"

He heard a voice that he didn't recognize saying something to her,—a hoarse voice, rough with anguish, and it was his own voice speaking:

"Kill you?" the queer harsh voice said. "Kill you! Why? You aren't—aren't worth killing!"

The color came surging up into her face. Only kindness she had known from Jerry before; only loving-kindness. And now this! Her blue eyes filled with slow, dreadful tears that spilled down her cheeks.

Trembling, he said: "I nearly—I nearly made myself a thief for you! Think of that; a *thief*—for you!"

He stepped closer to her, and she stood still, shaking, and waited for him. He took the corner of the gold brocade coat in his finger and thumb, looking at it. He lifted her hand and looked long at the flashing sapphire ring. He let her hand drop, and he looked into her face.

"I loved you!" he said, and there

was astonishment in his voice now. "Just think of it! I loved you!"

Both hands clutched at her throat, breathing so painfully that her whole body shook, she said in a gasping voice:

"When I saw you come in, I thought you had—had come to kill me! I wish you had! Yes, I wish you had!"

He shook his head then. He even smiled a little, a crooked anguished smile that twisted his face queerly.

"No!" he said. "Not worth it!"

He turned around and went out. He heard her making whimpering sounds behind him, but he never looked back. Boldly, he walked down the hall to the elevator and rang the bell long and loud.

"Tell Minnetti I was here!" he said in a queer, loud voice to the operator, as they descended. "Tell him I was here between three and four, and went away again!"

"Yes, sir!" the elevator man said, and thought that Minnetti certainly did have some queer ducks come to see him.

He flung open the gate as they reached the street level, and his passenger started to leave the car, stopped, turned completely around and then stared at him with a dazed look.

"Do you know where I'm going?" he asked.

"No, sir! Don't you?" the man said, grinning.

His passenger gazed at him steadily.

"Well, do you know what my name is?" he asked in a whisper, his face close to the operator's.

"What?"

"Do you—do you know what my name is?" he said. "I don't know what my name is! Do you—do you know what it is?"

The colored man threw back his

head and gave a loud, hearty guffaw.

"Yah! That's good, that is!" he crowed. "Don't know your own name, you says. Yah! You go on home and get a good sleep, mister! You be all right tomorrer!"

Three days after that the papers published in a large city five-hundred miles away, carried an account of a man picked up wandering about the streets in a dazed condition, unable to tell his name, or where he came from.

A young doctor who was tremendously interested in such cases put him under the influence of a drug

which had proved helpful in other similar cases, and under its influence the man stated that he was Jerry L. Dunham, married, the owner of a locksmith business, of New Rodford. This proved to be true.

The strangest part of the whole affair was that the man's young wife had apparently vanished right off the face of the earth. Whether her disappearance had anything to do with his condition, or not, could not be ascertained; for, with his recovery from the drug that had been administered to him, he lapsed again into his former state, and was unable to remember anything at all of his past.

SOME CALL IT LOVE

By Dal Devening

A golden moon, a garden seat,
The scent of summer flowers,
A glorious girl with lips as sweet
As youth's most precious hours.
A warm caress, a clinging kiss,
A moment's ecstasy—
The cynics sneer and tell me this
Is just biology.

A throbbing tune, a perfect floor,
And all of beauty's charms—
What, all? A million, million more!—
Close snuggled in my arms.
A witching waltz, a magic dance
Whose rhythmic wizardry
Flings wide the portals of romance—
No, of biology!

A little room, a snowy bed,
A jaunty traveling dress,
Some baggage labeled, Newly wed!
A tender, sweet caress;
Two pairs of slippers side by side—
If that's biology
I'll tell the great big world and wide
It's good enough for me!

MEN ARE LIKE THAT

By Florence Stonebraker

RALEIGH SHREVE, clubman, broker, and millionaire, was past master of the manly art of taking his fun where he found it. But when it came to the woman he Lohreng grinned up to the altar— Well, there was something else again. Raleigh did not propose to have a certain proportion of the male population of New York giving an I-had-her-first wink behind his back when he took the plunge he had been wary enough to delay for thirty-seven years.

Against much competition, the fortunate lady had been elected. She was an ash-blonde,—her name was Greta Hurley,—that Raleigh had met in San Francisco the winter before, and he was as sure of her as an experienced connoisseur of ladies, good and bad, could be of one of the most beautiful women he ever had seen. He was reasonably convinced that Greta, morally speaking, was "all wool and a yard wide." But he wanted cumulative proof, if such proof were available.

All of which—and more—was at the bottom of the somewhat intricate plan he was proposing to Jerry Martyn, as they sat lunching at a certain Forty-second Street speakeasy.

Jerry, incidentally, was a man in whom Raleigh felt he could place the utmost confidence. They had been roommates at college, had been drunk together, had chased women together, had been partners in business. And now that Jerry was married to a wo-

men he did not particularly love, Raleigh, Jerry, and Jerry's wife frequently made a threesome for speak-easy parties and Sunday evening suppers. In short, they were friends. Very good friends.

"The idea," Raleigh explained to Jerry, "is briefly this. Greta arrives on the train in one hour, and we are to be married tomorrow. I plan to meet her, and take her up to my hunting lodge for the night. As you know, that is not a two-hour run from town. My housekeeper is there to give an illusion of conventionality. Just before dinner-time, this evening, I want you to drop in, as if by accident. I will arrange to receive a telephone call during dinner which will call me back to town on business. I will ask you to stay at the lodge with Greta. You two will be there, practically alone, all night. Now, putting it bluntly, I want you to put her over the jumps."

"You mean, see if I can make her?"

"Yes."

"It seems like a rotten trick to play on the girl you expect to marry," said Jerry, lighting a cigarette. He looked at his friend. "How can you do such a thing to the woman you say you love?"

Raleigh was casually unashamed.

"I'm doing it in self-protection," he said. He beckoned the waiter and ordered more drinks. "I've seen too much of women, Jerry," he explained. "The wives of half of my friends cheat under their very noses,—make

fools of them,—spend their money to doll up for other men. I'll be damned if any woman is going to make that kind of a fool of me."

"You've done your part to help their wives make fools of your friends," Jerry reminded him.

"Sure; I know it. That's why I'm not taking any chances."

"This girl you expect to marry; you believe that she is on the level?"

"I wouldn't marry her unless I did believe it."

"You love her?"

"Yes."

"Then, why not let well enough alone?"

"No. The woman who rates me for a husband must be able to stand the test."

Jerry looked more amused than disgusted.

"You mean to say," he asked, "that you love her, yet you actually would not marry her if you knew she had—er—experimented a bit with life?"

"Positively not!"

"Then, you're a fool," said Jerry.

"Would you marry a woman who could be got, without marriage?"

"Of course; if I loved her," said Jerry. "What has that to do with anything? Why, the only woman I ever loved was that kind. Met her on a train, one night out of Chicago. The two of us were on the observation platform, and we drifted into conversation. Right away, we clicked. Both of us knew it. There was that quick, sharp affinity that sometimes happens between two strangers who meet——"

It was a difficult thing to explain to another man, but Jerry tried to tell Raleigh something of the charm of this girl in his past. It was the first time he had talked of her to any one. He said that her hair was soft and shiny, like pale silk; and her full, sensuous lips a deep crimson, with an infinite sweetness about them. He said

that her great dark eyes were like no other eyes he had ever seen.

It had begun, of course, as thousands of other physical experiences had begun. He had said to the girl:

"I like you; you appeal to me. I think that I appeal to you. We have this night to do with as we will. We are ships that pass in the night; the chances are we will never meet again. Neither of us has anything to lose, but a great deal to gain, perhaps. A big thrill! A wonderful experience! You need not tell me even your name. I will ask you nothing about yourself; not where you come from—or where you are going. I only ask you, let us have this night together!"

He tried to tell Raleigh how, for him, there had never been another woman like her. The whiteness of her body,—the feel of her,—the excitement and sense of aliveness that came to him there in that darkened Pullman berth. There had never been anything like it in his whole life.

He had tried over and over, with other women, to recapture the thrill of that hour, but it had been impossible.

He had returned to his own berth in another car before morning; and then, for some reason, a section of the train had been switched to another engine. Her car had been one to go. He had never seen her again. That had been seven years ago, but he had never forgotten her. He had remained single for four years, hoping to find her somewhere; then, finally, three years ago, he had married a woman who couldn't compare with her.

"You mean you would have married a woman like that," Raleigh asked contemptuously, "a woman who would pick up with a stranger on a train?"

"Of course," said Jerry. "Why not? She was the only woman I ever loved. That hour in her arms seems

to me, as I look back, the only hour that I ever lived completely."

"What sort of loyalty could you expect from a woman like that?"

"As much as she could expect from me," said Jerry. "What I am trying to tell you is, that if you love this girl, the thing to do is marry her and not go around prying into matters that have very little to do with love. This is rather a caddish scheme of yours; why not give it up?"

"No," said Raleigh, "I mean to go through with it. And you are the man. Women always fall for you. If any man could tempt Greta, the chances are you could."

"My own wife never fell for me very hard," Jerry pointed out with a grin. "She gets hot and bothered over me, like an icicle in a strong northwest wind."

"Your wife happens to be a cold woman," said Raleigh quickly. "The chances are that no man——"

"Yes, that's true enough," Jerry agreed.

"Then, you will go through with my plan?"

"Yes," Jerry promised. "Because we are friends, I'll go through with it; but I tell you beforehand that I think it's a lousy piece of business."

That evening Jerry arrived at the lodge in his roadster, a little before six. It was snowing and very cold. Raleigh was expecting him, and he opened the door as Jerry's car swept up the little circular driveway, lined with evergreens. Jerry threw off his raccoon coat and hat, and followed Raleigh into the long, raftered living-room, across to the open fire. He stood there warming his hands.

"This is a swell room," Jerry observed. "Like to own this sort of a layout myself." His eyes went around the long room, hung with Indian blankets and animal skins. Several huge skins were scattered over

the floor, and in a far corner a stuffed bear peered out of glassy eyes.

Raleigh brought drinks and cigarettes. He gave Jerry a stiff drink of whiskey. He was smiling smugly, with an expression of deep satisfaction over life in general and himself in particular.

"She has come," he said softly to Jerry.

"Yes?"

"Yes. She's upstairs, dressing. And boy, I'm telling you, I have picked a prize. She is even lovelier than I thought. You see, I hadn't been with her for nearly a year, and she has ripened, developed. Believe me, there isn't a chorus dame in the Scandals to match her."

Jerry smiled. "Perhaps you've changed your mind about your noble experiment?"

"No." Raleigh shook his head, but he smiled, unworriedly. "We'll go through with it, but I'll tell you, confidentially, I'm not a damn bit worried about the outcome."

"No?"

"No. I'm more sure of her than ever, since she has come. She has just that bit of coldness, that reserve, that makes a fellow almost ashamed of his beastly animalism. Do you know what I mean?"

"No," said Jerry frankly. "I've heard that sort of talk before, but I never felt convinced that it really meant anything." Except that somebody was getting bulldozed, he added to himself.

"Now you're being the cynical one," said Raleigh.

"Not at all. I simply don't see that it's any compliment to the lady to say that she makes a man ashamed of wanting her. After all, wanting her is the highest compliment you can pay a woman——"

And then she came down the stairs.

There was her voice, first, with that

husky quality, speaking to Raleigh:
"Shall I come down, dear?"

Jerry turned and saw her coming, slowly. Tall, slim, with hair like pale, gleaming silk, great dark eyes like no other eyes in the world, the incredible whiteness of her slim throat and partially bare back slashed against the unrelieved blackness of her velvet frock. He trembled as she came toward him.

Their eyes met.

Raleigh was saying, as if from far away:

"Greta, I want to present my best and oldest friend."

Jerry felt her hand trembling as she laid it in his. There was no mistaking the flash of recognition in her eyes.

She, too, remembered!

Greta Hurlÿ! So that was her name. If only he had known years before, instead of three years too late.

There was a tense, scared moment, —a moment when Jerry wondered if he could act the part that was set for him. Could he manage to hide the quick, distracting emotions that swept him at the sight of this girl? Could he act the casual manner of a man who was meeting his friend's fiancée for the first time, so that Raleigh would never suspect this was the woman he had talked about that afternoon?

He must.

His hand was unsteady as he took the drink Raleigh poured, but he managed an easy smile. Soon he found himself talking composedly of unimportant things,—the bad condition of the roads up from New York,—the plane trip across continent,—his favorite bootlegger.

Dinner was served.

There was plenty of liquor, and Jerry went heavy on whiskey and soda. He needed it to keep himself steady.

Greta was very quiet. Her eyes sought Jerry's many times during the meal, and he seemed to detect in them a desperate, haunted look. He could not tell if it was fear or unhappiness.

Raleigh drank a great deal, and offered a number of toasts to himself as the fortunate bridegroom-elect. Toward the end of the meal he became rather boisterous, and a little silly.

Jerry wished that he could escape. His position was intolerable. He felt trapped, and didn't know what to do about it.

There was no way to escape unless he told Raleigh the truth, and to do that, of course, was impossible.

But to be left here for the night, with this woman! . . . He dare not trust himself!

Yet, since there was really nothing he could do, he did nothing.

Presently Raleigh was called to the phone.

He returned to the table, deeply regretful. He went over to where Greta sat, and leaned down to kiss her hand.

"I am called into New York on urgent business, dear," he said. "It is extremely important, otherwise I would not let it tear me away from you. It will keep me in town until tomorrow morning. Do you think you can live through the night without me—if I leave you in the care of my very best friend?"

He smiled teasingly at Greta, and then he smiled at Jerry.

Greta lowered her eyes. It seemed to Jerry that she went a little pale, and when she spoke, her voice was low:

"I am quite sure I can live through the night," she said.

Raleigh kissed her and patted Jerry's shoulder as he passed him.

"Take good care of her, won't you?" he said.

Jerry did not answer. . .

They sat on the wide divan, spread with Indian rugs, before the open fire. There was no other light in the room. Greta sat in one corner of the divan, a cigarette between her fingers. Now and then she puffed at it nervously. The half-light of the flames spread a soft, sensuous glow over her blonde beauty, made her skin seem whiter, her dark eyes more like smouldering coals.

Jerry, in the other corner, watched her. Presently he spoke.

"This is a hell of a trick for fate to play on two people," he said to her.

"Fate is a smart lady," she reminded him softly. "Sometimes she has a reason behind her madness."

"Does that mean you are glad life has thrown us together a second time—even though it is so damnably too late?" he asked quickly.

Greta stared at the fire. "I do not know," she told him, "whether I am glad or not. I only know that I never could quite forget you."

"That night!" he said softly. "There was a new moon. Do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember. There were stars."

"Yes, stars."

"But after a while a storm came up. Do you remember the thunder and sharp lightning?"

"That," he said, "was when you were in my arms. And you said that you were usually afraid of electric storms, but that you felt so safe in my arms, while you were there you were not afraid, even of life itself. Do you remember that?"

"Yes," she told him softly, "I remember."

They drew together, and he put one arm around her. He touched her satiny cheek with his hand, and drew her face around to his. As their lips met, that strange, rapturous fire swept them as it had done nearly seven

years before. He drew her into his arms. She was so beautiful—so filled with the fire of life!

Often, since that first time, he had wondered if his feeling about this woman were mostly illusion,—if imagination and looking back had created most of the thrill of it,—if the mad ecstasy would be gone if he could have her again.

Now he had found her. She was here in his arms, abandoning herself to his kisses,—to the hot, hard flame of his lips caressing her cheeks, her eyelids, her lips, the line of her throat. He was experiencing it all again,—and it was all just as he had dreamed of it. The flame she aroused burned even more fiercely than it had before.

Suddenly he sat up and let her go.

"You are to marry my friend tomorrow," he said shortly.

"Yes, I am to marry your friend tomorrow."

She made no effort to move from him. She lay relaxed, her great eyes staring up at him. He sat on the edge of the divan, clenching and unclenching his hands. His nails dug into the palms and left little white grooves, and in one place the blood came. He bit his underlip. He got up and poured himself a drink, swallowed it, came back to the divan and lighted a cigarette. He sat down again, smoking the cigarette and still another cigarette and looking into the flames. Then he looked at the girl who was still staring at him. There was a queer, tempting, half-smile about her lips.

"Do you love him?" Jerry asked suddenly.

"No."

"Then, why are you marrying him?"

She considered that. "The usual reasons," she said finally. "I need security, background, protection against

old age. A woman has to think of those things. Long ago I gave up hoping to get love and marriage—together. It just doesn't seem to happen; at least, not to many people."

"No," said Jerry slowly, "it doesn't happen to many people." Then he blurted out, unhappily: "If only I were free, we might make it happen, you and I; but I am not free."

"You see," said Greta softly, with a touch of sadness. "You are not free. It seems to be like that always."

Jerry smoked through another cigarette furiously. He kept thinking and staring into the fire, and for a long time he said nothing. Then he turned, looking down at her, and caught her shoulders. Without realizing it, his fingers dug into her flesh. She cried out softly, but made no effort to move from him.

"I want to tell you something." Jerry's voice was tense, full of the excitement and fire and desire that were consuming him. "I've wanted you ever since that other night when we were together. I don't believe there has been a night since, through all these years, that I haven't thought of you; haven't wished, dimly, that I could have that experience again. I would have asked you to marry me if I had found you in time. Now I am tied to another woman. She means very little to me, but I would have no excuse to divorce her. So far as I know, she is straight as they come.

"But I still want you like hell! I want you tonight,—now! You are to marry my friend tomorrow. There is nothing I have any right to do about that. I have no right to ask you for anything. But I cannot help myself. I love you; I'm mad for you. It may be that fate is dealing us this one last night together. During all the other nights in the world we must be lost to each other—thinking of that is hell. But this one night,

out of all eternity, is ours—if we choose to take it. If we do—you can trust me. Raleigh will never know. It's up to you. But—wouldn't we be fools to pass up a few hours of paradise?"

His face was closer to hers. He had leaned over, both his arms had gone around her. He could feel the tense excitement that filled her, could see the fierce eagerness in her eyes. Her hands were trembling as they touched his cheek. Her lips smiled, her eyes smiled, veiling the glowing fire in their depths. She slid both arms around his neck, and drew his face closer. All the time she kept looking at him, and said nothing.

"Darling!" she whispered at last, fastening her lips in his hair.

His arms tightened about her, pressing her, straining her slim body against his.

"Sweetheart!" he murmured again, letting his lips explore the glowing beauty of her face and shoulders. "This one night—wouldn't we be fools to let it go—" he kept muttering.

It was three hours later. Midnight.

"And now," said Jerry, "we've got to get out of here."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning, I'm taking no chances on jeopardizing your future happiness."

"Happiness?" she said mockingly. "As if there could be happiness for me—after tonight, when I must let you go." Her voice was bitter.

"Security, then," said Jerry. "Like that word better? The point is, there must be no thought in Raleigh's mind but that you are above suspicion. Men are queer beings, when it comes to the women they love. He left you here in my care, I know; but later, he might regret that. Some day something might come up to start him wondering, and then he would remember that we were here together

all night—alone. To avoid any such possibility, I am going to take you into town. We will tell Raleigh that you thought things over, and decided you preferred not to stay here with me, unchaperoned. We can make New York in less than two hours, and you are going to spend the rest of the night at my apartment—with my wife."

Greta looked at him queerly. "Are you trying to hurt me, by any chance?" she asked him.

"No." He shook his head. "I am trying to protect you. Please trust me, believe that this is the wise thing to do. Now go up and get your things."

He had on his coat and was waiting for her by the dying fire when she came down the stairway, wrapped in a dark fur coat. She walked slowly across the room to him, and slipped her arms about his neck. She laid her cheek against his.

"This, then, is good-by," she said softly.

"Yes."

His arms went about her, and as he held her against his heart she could feel a tremor run through his body.

"This is good-by," he told her. "But, at least, we have this night to remember, always; no one can take this from us. And you—if it means anything to you—can always know that you are the only woman I ever loved."

He strained her to his heart, and then he kissed her lips, over and over. It was as if he wanted to leave a burning imprint that no other man's kisses could ever wipe out. There were hot, blinding tears in Greta's eyes as she looked up at him broken-heartedly. He kissed her tears away. Passionately, hopelessly, they clung to each other, trying to make this pitifully brief moment last forever.

Neither of them could speak as they went out of the lodge and closed the

door and got in Jerry's roadster.

They did not talk on the way into New York. There was so much between them—the rapture of heaven and the torturous misery of hell—and words were such little, futile things.

"I hope you will like my wife," Jerry said, as they went up in the apartment elevator. "She is a very nice woman. Frigid as the devil, and not exactly pretty, but nice."

He slipped the key in the lock, and turned it softly. It made practically no sound.

Jerry went in first, and Greta hesitated on the threshold. As she stood there, waiting, Jerry stopped suddenly, stock-still. Greta heard him mutter: "Good God!" His hand reached back and caught her, pulling her into the room. But he signaled to her to move softly. She entered noiselessly.

Her eyes followed Jerry's through the heavy, wine-colored drapes and came to rest on the bedroom-and-bath third act, last scene, taking place in the adjoining room.

A man in a dark red silk dressing-gown was seated in a big chair, and a dark woman, with a lavender *négligé* falling away from her bare shoulders, was in his arms. She was caressing his hair, and pleading with him, after the fashion of a mistress whose sun is about to set.

"But, darling," she begged, "you know you are the only man I have ever loved. I never gave a damn about Jerry, and I have worshiped you. For three long years—ever since I married Jerry I have worshiped you. Surely, you owe me something in return. I cannot give you up completely; it would kill me. I tell you, it would kill me to give you up—" Her voice rose hysterically.

The man kissed her with an air of complete boredom.

"It is the only way," he said firmly. "I have loved you; of course, I have loved you. I love you now," he added, as convincingly as if there were a word of truth in it. "But there are other things to be considered. When a man is getting married, he owes something to the girl, at least, at first."

"You left her to come to me tonight," said the woman triumphantly. "You will leave her again—to come to me. I know you will. Promise me that you will come."

He shoved her away impatiently, and got to his feet.

"I tell you, I'm through," he said, almost savagely. "Why can't a woman ever understand a man means it when he says he's through? I've tried to be decent about it; but, my God, why can't you have sense enough to let go of a man, when he wants to go?"

The woman became angry. She was thin, and dark, and her black eyes flashed threateningly as he flung his taunting words at her.

"Oh! So you think you can talk to me like that?" she snapped. "All right. You've told me a thing or two; now it's my turn. If you think you can use me for a convenience for three years, and cheat on your closest friend, and then throw me aside when you feel like it and get away with it, you're fooled in your woman, Raleigh Shreve!"

Greta gave a sharp cry. And it was only then that the two people in the other room realized that they were not alone.

There was an ugly scene, in which both Raleigh and Jerry's wife tried to lie out of everything, and swore at each other when they couldn't get away with it.

Greta looked the disgust she couldn't put in words and lost no time in telling Raleigh Shreve she wouldn't marry him now if he were the last man on earth. Jerry could scarcely wait for Greta to finish telling Raleigh where he got off, to begin pointing out to his wife that he wanted a divorce, without any delay. And if she wanted him to help with the expense of it, she would do well to see a lawyer and get started for Reno within forty-eight hours, since he had a little wedding on hand that couldn't be delayed. He went over and slipped his arm around Greta.

It was then, so to speak, that Raleigh broke. He swore all over the place, and having called Jerry all the insulting epithets in modern usage, he went back to the classics for a few extra hot numbers. And he ended up by declaring he believed the whole damn thing was a trap.

"Sure it was a trap," agreed Jerry cheerfully; "your own rosy little brain-child! And the most beautiful demonstration I ever hope to see of a rat being caught in its own trap."

BEAUTY FOR SALE

By Eve Woodburn

GAY was amazingly beautiful. I can close my eyes now and see her with her soft brown curly hair which she wore in a long bob, her deep blue unfathomable eyes, milk-white skin, sweet little mouth and slim boyish figure.

Her name wasn't really Gay. It was Gertrude Ann, but we all called her Gay because she wished it. The name didn't particularly suit her, for there was an elusive, indefinable quality of pathos about her which was baffling from the first.

Gay wasn't one of us. That is, she hadn't grown up with us. She moved out on Long Island with her aunt in the spring of nineteen-thirty. I suppose we might have been more reticent about welcoming her into our little crowd, but for the fact that Barry McAllen fell head over heels in love with her, and what Barry said went with the rest of us.

"You've got to be nice to her, Peggy," he told me earnestly, about a month after Gay settled in our midst. "She's a great little kid——"

I interrupted him with a laugh. "Imagine describing Gay as a great little kid!" I scoffed. "Why, I'll bet she's five years older than any of us."

"That's because she has more poise," he submitted tactlessly. "But honestly, Peg, when you get acquainted with her you'll see how sweet and worth while she is. At least, give her a chance."

I had seen men in love often enough to know the symptoms and somehow

I couldn't help feeling a little sorry that it had happened to Barry. He'd been such a good pal to all of us. He wasn't given to making love to girls as a pastime, and I knew when he really fell he'd fall mighty hard.

The following week I gave a bridge luncheon for Gay; after that she was accepted officially as one of us and included in all of our parties.

"You've been wonderful to me, Peggy," she said one afternoon when she dropped in for tea. . . . We call it tea. It was really cocktails and cigarettes.

"Well, anybody Barry likes——" I began, then broke off suddenly. "Oh, you do care about him, don't you, Gay? Because he's crazy about you."

Her lovely eyes became thoughtful, dreamy.

"I think he's great," she retorted finally. "But we've known one another such a short time. And when one is contemplating matrimony, one should be very, very sure."

I sighed. Certainly, she didn't talk like a girl in love, and I was surprised when a few weeks later she appeared with a large solitaire on her third finger left. The next time we were alone I asked her about it.

"You're so sweet and understanding," she said, "that I have an irresistible impulse to confide in you."

We had driven in town for lunch and a matinée and had found a quiet little booth in a restaurant in the Village.

"Gay,—if you aren't sure——" I be-

girl, but she interrupted me with a short laugh.

I regarded her curiously. It was one of those moments when she seemed older—alien. I wished suddenly that she wouldn't confide in me. I felt that I didn't want to know.

"Peg, I've got to marry some one," she continued. "My aunt has only taken me for a year. You see, Dad went smash when the crash came, and Aunt Ellen said she'd back me for a year and give me a chance to make a good marriage." She shrugged her shoulders. "Well, you see I'm doing it."

"But don't you love him? Don't you—oh, what about Barry? Where does he get off?"

"He's a dear boy. I'll be nice to him. I'll live up to my part of the marriage bargain. I'm supposed to be beautiful. That's what I'm selling, and he's the buyer. He won't be sorry because I'll never let him know."

"A man always knows if a woman doesn't care. You can play your part for a while, but you'll go stale in it. Gay, please, don't do it!"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, what the hell! Can we get a drink in this place? Just now I could do with one."

I motioned to a waiter and we gave our order. The liquor was strong and after the third drink Gay became even more communicative.

"How old are you, Peg?"

"Twenty-one," I confessed reluctantly. I hated to tell my age.

"How old do you think I am?"

I smiled. I wanted to be tactful. "Oh, you're about twenty-five," I said after a moment. "Not that you look it. But your manner——"

"I'm thirty-one," she interrupted and laughed bitterly. "Of course, Barry doesn't know. Not that I think it would make any difference."

"I'm sure it wouldn't," I told her.

"Now you see why my aunt is hell-bent to get me married. I suppose she's right, at that. I've had plenty of men make a play for me, God knows. I'm that type. They can always visualize me as a charming mistress, but not as a wife. Don't ask me why."

I didn't. I felt that I knew the answer. Most men wouldn't trust her. Barry was a child so far as women were concerned.

"There isn't any one else?" I demanded.

She shook her head. "No, thank God! That helps. And just as a matter of record, Peg, there never has been." She was silent for a moment, lost in thought. "Oh, I've liked some men a lot, but I've never felt that my happiness depended upon any of them. It's never mattered much who was at the other end of the wire when the telephone rang so long as he had money and was willing to spend it. Sounds horribly mercenary, doesn't it?"

I nodded. "But I'm trying not to judge you," I told her. "I've never known what it meant not to have plenty of money, and I'm trying not to blame you for wishing to make your future secure."

She reached across the table and patted my hand affectionately.

"That's what I like about you, Peg. You're so damned square." She rose and picked up her gloves and bag. "Come on, let's get going. I hate to arrive at a theatre late and stumble around in the dark trying to find my seat." . . .

The following week Gay's aunt was called to California by the serious illness of her sister. Gay told me that her aunt was reluctant to leave her alone with the servants and was all for taking her along.

"It will never do," she ended helplessly. "I don't want to leave Barry."

Besides, I'd die on a trip with Aunt Ellen. She's awful."

"Barry would wait for you if you went to China," I assured her.

"Well, maybe. But I'm not taking any chances."

"You can stay with me," I suggested.

"Dear Peg. You're like that. But I know you know too much now to approve of me wholeheartedly, and I'd rather not. However, if worse comes to worse, I may take you up on your invitation."

I told Barry about it that night at the country club dance. Gay hadn't broken the news. I presume she was still trying to figure out some way to escape the California trip. Barry laughed lightly.

"Oh, that can be arranged," he said. "I'll have mother invite her to stay with us."

His mother and father joined us when we had finished the dance, and he immediately made the proposal to them.

Mrs. McAllen was a meek little woman who lived only for her family. She was the type of woman who was sure to inspire the thought, "How did he ever happen to marry her?" For Barry's father was handsome and charming and looked much too young to have an engaged son. His hair was almost white, but his face was without a line. He had even, regular features and was as tall and straight as Barry.

"Why, of course, she'll stay with us," he retorted, before his wife could speak. "It will be a pleasure to have her." He turned to Mrs. McAllen. "Be sure and ask her tonight so she can make her plans."

"Yes, dear," his wife said meekly.

Barry was delighted with the arrangement and hastened over to the other side of the room to tell Gay.

"They'll have a good time," Mrs.

McAllen remarked wistfully, watching her son's retreating figure proudly. "Young people have such good times now, anyway. I was married when I was so young—only seventeen."

"Well, you've had plenty of good times," Mr. McAllen reminded her, a note of impatience coloring his tone. "We've had our good times, Clara. Sort of grown up together. That's the way it should be. Am I right, Peg?"

I nodded. I had a feeling that Barry's father had had a better time than his mother. He always impressed me as the type of man who would take ruthlessly from life the things he wanted, and it would be just too bad for the person who got in his way. And while Mrs. McAllen worshiped Barry, he gave his deepest affection to his father, who accepted him rather casually. Life is like that.

I didn't see Gay or Barry for some time after that dance. I was away for several weeks and when I returned I noticed a subtle change in Gay. It was vague, indeterminate, but it was there. I hardly knew whether I wanted them to go through with the marriage or not, after Gay's talk with me that day in the speak-easy, and when I noticed this change in her I was even less certain. But I felt that if she didn't go through with it, Barry would never get over the blow. . . .

One night Jane Latimer gave a little party. For once Gay lived up to her name. She was as scintillating as champagne and seemed less inclined than previously to devote herself exclusively to Barry, although her manner toward him was flawless.

Jack Kellman had always shown considerable interest in Gay, and on this occasion she didn't discourage his attentions. I wondered just what her game was, as she was much too

shrewd not to see that Jack wasn't the marrying type. We'd all been intrigued with Jack at one time or another and made a play for him, but he had accepted our efforts with good-natured tolerance. However, I must admit that I had never completely recovered from my failure. I always felt that underneath Jack's easy-going manner there was a great deal that was fine and worth while, and I'd kept an open place in my heart for him.

It seemed silly for Gay to try and make Barry jealous. She was too sure of him for that sort of thing. Later, it happened that Jack was able to throw more light on the terrible tragedy which happened than anybody else.

About eleven o'clock I met Gay upstairs in the dressing-room. She had been drinking more than usual, but she didn't show the effects of it, except by her line of excited chatter.

"There are some things you'll probably never understand, Peg," she told me, laughing lightly.

"Doubtless," I retorted shortly.

"Love, for instance. I can't imagine you shooting the whole works for anybody."

"Is that really done in real life?" I queried scornfully.

"Watch my smoke, baby," she called over her shoulder and disappeared.

So that was that! Probably, the answer was that she was having an affair with Jack. I felt a sharp twinge of jealousy. That Jack could double-cross Barry! Oh, well, when men's emotions were involved, their sense of honor automatically ceased to function.

Shortly after midnight Barry came to me and asked me if I had seen Gay.

"I haven't seen her for the last half-hour," he said, "and I'm worried."

I laughed shortly. "Oh, come now, Barry. That's silly. She'll show up."

"Jack isn't around either," he remarked significantly.

"He's probably gone home. He came alone, you know," I reminded him. "He told me a few minutes ago that he was tired and going to check out early."

"They may have taken a ride together."

"It's quite possible," I said. And added, "Don't be mid-Victorian, Barry."

"Oh, it isn't that. I trust Gay absolutely. Only, it wasn't like her to go and not tell me."

I thought it was exactly like her, but I didn't voice the opinion. Instead, I looked anxiously at the door, expecting to see Gay's beautiful figure appear at any moment. But she didn't return and Barry became more and more disturbed.

"We came over in her roadster," he told me just before the party broke up. "I've been outside looking for it, and it isn't there. I'm sure something has happened. Will you and Bill take me in your car and see if we can find her?"

I had come to the dance with Bill Keenan, and I went to him now and told him about Barry's concern.

"Sure, we'll take him," Bill said when I had finished. "But he'll probably find her safe at home. Perhaps the party went stale and she checked out. It would be like her, you know."

Bill didn't like Gay. He never had. But he did everything he could to help Barry that night. First we drove to Barry's house. His father was in the library reading. He regarded us in mild surprise when we breezed in on him.

"Have I seen Gay?" he echoed, and I thought I caught a slight suggestion of annoyance in his tone. "My dear children, how should I know where she is?"

"We thought she might have come

home," Barry explained. "Sorry to disturb you, Dad."

His father smiled indulgently. "Oh, that's quite all right. She hadn't been drinking too much, had she?"

"Maybe a little more than usual," Barry admitted, "but not too much. Liquor never seems to bother Gay. I'm not worried about that."

"You'd better sit down and have a drink with me—all of you—and calm your nerves. I'm sure she'll show up," Mr. McAllen said reassuringly.

Barry wouldn't listen to the suggestion. He was too nervous. We piled into Bill's roadster and continued our search.

We went in the wrong direction for several miles, then turned back and took another road. At first Bill and I tried to cheer Barry with a running fire of light chatter, but after a while we subsided into gloomy silence as our fears increased.

We found her at dawn about ten miles from Barry's home. We reached a spot in the road where there was a sharp curve and an embankment. It was Bill who discovered the long maroon-colored roadster, bottom side up, at the foot of the embankment. He jammed his brakes and brought his car to an abrupt stop, pointing silently to his discovery.

"You'd better wait here, Barry," he said, as Barry gave a cry of horror. "Peg and I will——"

He didn't finish the sentence. Barry was out of the car and half-way down the bank, and we followed quickly.

Barry picked her up. She had been thrown clear of the wreckage, and there were no ugly wounds or bruises. She might have been asleep. The rouge was still on her cheeks, so she didn't even have the pallor of death, and her lips were parted in a little smile. Her face looked rested. Peaceful.

We took her back to Barry's house

as quickly as we could and called a physician. It was useless. Gay was beyond the help of any of us. We'd known in our hearts all of that terrible ride home that she was dead, but none of us dared voice the thought, and I don't think that Barry had even admitted it into his conscious mind, for he kept urging Bill to drive faster.

Barry's father gave a sharp gasp of distress when he saw us. Then he became all efficiency. He did all the telephoning; he took charge of us, trying to calm our shattered nerves. When the physician arrived, he insisted that he give us all a sleeping potion and that we go to bed at once. Then he telephoned our homes and broke the news and said he was keeping us there for a few days to help with Barry.

Barry went about in stunned silence until after the funeral. If any of us spoke to him, he would regard us in dazed wonder. That is, anybody except his father. The latter was the only one who seemed able to help him and I think that during those days the bond between them became even more firmly cemented. His mother fluttered about the place helplessly, trying to be of assistance and usually succeeding in making matters worse.

Barry was never the same with the crowd after that. In fact, for a time we were never quite the same toward each other. We never referred to Gay when he was around. I think we all felt vaguely that there were things about the tragedy which one of us knew and that it was up to that one to clear up the mystery. Only, we didn't know which one it was. We had suspicions of each other. It had somehow leaked out that I had been in Gay's confidence, also that I had been cool to her the night of her death, and I know the others wondered just how far I was responsible. Of course, we all knew in our hearts

it was suicide, even though the coroner called it accidental. Gay was too expert a driver to have a thing like that happen accidentally. Besides, her manner that last evening told us that something was wrong.

Jack was under far deeper suspicion than I was, and I know it worried him. Barry treated him with studied politeness, and I often found myself wondering just what had happened between Gay and him. If she had really cared for Jack, why hadn't she broken with Barry? I tortured myself with questions. Jack had more money than Barry. But Jack wasn't the marrying kind. He was, however, just the type of man she might lose her head over and go smash if she couldn't have him. Could Jack have double-crossed Barry and then thrown Gay over when she became too serious? Had Gay been discreetly carrying on an affair with him and only on that last night given us an inkling of what was going on?

We probably would never have known what really happened if it hadn't been for Celia Cunningham. Celia had been a house guest of Lenore Dexter's on the night of the dance, and she had left about midnight to catch a train for home.

Three months later she returned for a brief visit. It happened that she came back the day before Barry and his father had planned to sail. Mr. McAllen was taking him for a trip around the world, hoping that a complete change would help him to get a grip upon himself. Barry's father wasn't looking any too fit himself, and it was easy to see that Barry's trouble had taken its toil out of him. He had invited us all over to the house for a cocktail party on the afternoon before their departure, and Lenore brought Celia.

We were in the garden, sipping our drinks and trying to be gay.

Celia had come directly from the train and was apologetic for her traveling clothes. She greeted us all, then looked about, puzzled.

"But where is the beautiful girl?" she demanded.

I had a terrible premonition of what was coming and tried to head her off. "We're all beautiful," I declared, forcing a little laugh. "Don't be like that, Celia."

"Of course, you're all beautiful, darling. But I mean the girl with the tragic eyes—Gay somebody. I thought she was gorgeous. And Barry was giving her a grand rush when I was here last. Don't tell me that you're fickle like the rest of the men, Barry."

There was an awful silence, and Barry, with an agonized apology, abruptly rose and left us. His mother followed him anxiously. I knew he'd rather she wouldn't. She couldn't help. Nobody could help except his father, but the latter stood rooted to the spot, every vestige of color slowly draining from his face. It seemed to me that he aged terribly in that dreadful moment.

Celia looked hurt and bewildered, and I went over and put my arm around her, explaining what had happened.

"Oh, I—I'm sorry," she gasped. Then rambled on nervously: "I didn't know—I never dreamed. Why, I just can't realize it. She was so lovely—so full of life!" She turned suddenly and faced Mr. McAllen: "I went home from the dance early. I wouldn't let Lenore come until later. I had to go and finish packing, and she met Dick and me at the station. As I drove by here I caught sight of Gay's maroon roadster. You were just getting in, Mr. McAllen. I tried to wave good-by to her, but neither of you saw me."

During this recital Barry's father had gazed at Celia in fascinated hor-

ror. He must have felt as though an avalanche were about to descend upon him, an avalanche which he was helpless to stop or change from its deadly course. When she had finished, the glass dropped from his lifeless fingers.

"Barry—Barry mustn't know," he managed to stammer finally through purple lips. "He—he's been through enough."

We glanced apprehensively toward the house. Barry and his mother were coming down the walk to rejoin us. Celia looked at us helplessly, and finally her eyes rested upon me in pitiful interrogation.

"It's all right," I told her gently. "I guess it's better to have things cleared up, only don't say any more. Mr. McAllen is right. Barry must never know."

I rode home with Jack that afternoon.

"Just how much did you know?" I demanded, as we drove away.

"Just about everything," he retorted shortly.

"And you kept quiet. You took the rap. Let all of us think that you were perhaps the man in the case. Jack, how could you?"

"How could I do otherwise? You would have done the same thing, Peg. Any of the crowd would. Don't you see—it was the only way. Oh, I know Barry hates me now, but he might better hate me than his father."

I nodded. "Jack, how did you know? You can trust me."

He reached over and patted my hand. "I know I can trust you, Peg. And as long as I've decided to marry you, I might as well tell you about it."

I gasped, but before I could reply, he continued:

"They registered just ahead of me at a hotel last winter. I saw them disappear into the elevator. Gay saw me as the elevator started. I looked on the register. It was *John Jones and wife*, just as I suspected."

"I suppose you were Thomas Brown and wife!"

"Peg! I never dreamed that you were a jealous cat. But it happens that I was there for a friendly little game of poker."

"Sez you," I scoffed. "Well, go on with your story."

"That's all there is. There isn't any more. Except that the night of the party Gay told me that she was going to meet him and that she was going to have him—no matter how. I asked her why she didn't marry him, and she said I knew damned well he was already married, but she was going to try and get him to get a divorce. Apparently, she couldn't put anything across that night—even a life of sin. Of course, she'd been drinking, or she wouldn't have loosened up like that to me. She said I knew so much I might as well know a little more."

I was silent. "Jack," I said, after a while, "you said something about getting married. What makes you think that the girl you have in mind is in a receptive mood?"

"Darling, I've known her all my life. I've had my eye on her for some time. And once in a while I've surprised a look in her eyes—" he shrugged his broad shoulders. "Well, maybe I'm wrong."

He wasn't. He was one hundred per cent right and I told him so.

IN MOVIE-TOWN

By Yerxa Rinini

GRANT MELSON looked up from his desk and at the door with a scowl of annoyance. Then:

"Come in," he said in answer to the rap which had sounded on its panel.

The door opened. The girl who entered and came straight up to Grant was astonishingly lovely, even considering that the place was Hollywood, where loveliness among young girls is the expected thing.

"I'm Rao Leeds," she announced, speaking in a vibrant, rather deep voice.

"Won't you be seated, Miss Leeds?"

She slid into the chair Grant indicated and crossed her slim ankles. The toes of her pumps barely reached the floor as she sat so, so little was she.

"I wanted to talk with you about my voice," she said. "You've helped so many of the others. I was doing pretty well in the silents, but the noise reels put an end to that. My voice simply doesn't get over."

"It isn't your voice so much, perhaps, as your diction that militates against you, Miss Leeds." Grant had taken in the details of the rather shabby brown of her ensemble, brightened by the chocker of jade which she wore about her almost too slender neck. "You southern girls speak charmingly, but in order to play a wide variety of rôles, you must be trained not to slur your sounds nor to drawl them. I suggest that you see this man." Grant picked up a card

from his desk and handed it to her.

"But, I don't want to see him," announced the girl. Her dark eyes held a stubborn glow. "I want *you* to help me!"

Grant Melson's gaze went back to the unfinished work on his desk and any interest in the girl which may have shown in his expression had vanished now.

"Sorry," he said perfunctorily. "I've really more work than I can handle, Miss Leeds,—and I feel that Crowper is the man for you to see." He rose by way of dismissing her.

"I'm not going to Crowper!" The girl's fascinating mouth had developed a balky contour. She was on her feet, a lithe little figure breathing stormily.

Grant, impatient to bring the interview to an end, shrugged slightly and moved forward to open the door for her, but she did not follow him.

"Mr. Melson!" She spoke his name sharply.

The man turned, faced her again; stood so at attention, cloaking his annoyance politely.

She said: "Did you ever notice Crowper's left eye—that drooping lid? It's a jinx, I tell you. I won't go to him!"

A broad smile lighted Grant's rather big features. He walked back to the girl, amusement, re-awakened interest, in his mien.

"Oh, so that's it?" He stood looking down into her face which now expressed an almost sulky resentment

of his quizzical regard of her. "Well," he decided, "I really shouldn't attempt to handle any more, Miss Leeds, but I'll see what I can do for you." He picked up an appointment book from his desk, leafed through it and said: "Come at three, tomorrow."

"Can't. Working. Have to make it in the evening."

"Very well. I don't like to tie up my evenings, but come at eight then, tomorrow, also Thursday and Monday,—that same hour—eight."

But she telephoned the following day that work at the studio would detain her throughout that evening and several to come. Would he take her later?

He thought it could be arranged.

Then, lunching at a studio commissary with another of his pupils, a day or two later, Grant saw Rao Leeds. The girl came in alone, costumed as a dancer of the far east, a robe thrown about her shoulders and cloaking her in a measure. She walked beautifully, head held high, feet stepping along with the alluring grace of the trained dancer. She did not see Grant, but made straight for a table a little distance from him where she joined a knot of girls dressed in costumes like her own.

Grant remarked casually to his companion: "That girl—the Leeds girl—she's really outstandingly beautiful, isn't she?"

"Yeh. Don't see her on the lot so much since the speakies came in. Queer little kid. Us fellas used to try to date her up. Never could make her though. Prob'ly got her a sugar-daddy she's bein' true to."

"Probably," agreed Grant, but deep within him something revolted at the thought. His gaze traveled to the girls' table. Rao was listening to something being said to her by a very blonde companion and suddenly she smiled. It was a heart-quicken-

sight, that smile. Grant observed that she ate very little. Mostly, she sat pensive, elbow on the table, chin cupped in hand. It was as if her thoughts were far away indeed from the glamor and hubbub about her. "She's a very beautiful child," Grant repeated.

"Huh? . . . Oh, Leeds? Say old man, how come all this interest in the gal?" Grant's companion chuckled. "Thought you were one of these fellas that just went ahead sawing wood. But then," he went on slyly, "you are getting to about that age, aren't you?"

Grant poked the youth a playful blow to the shoulder and rose.

"Don't you worry about me and my forties, young fella," he grinned and started for the exit.

His bow to Rao Leeds as he passed her table was distinctly perfunctory. And then, unaccountably, to himself at least and much to his annoyance, he went about for the balance of the day thinking at intervals that she must have thought his manner supercilious. He seemed to be unable to dismiss the girl entirely from his mind. To tell himself that Rao or what she thought, was of no consequence whatever, did not help materially. "I'm simply not myself, today," he decided, and having finished with his pupils, he went for a walk along the boulevard, encountered a close friend with whom he presently took dinner and attended one of the exclusive little parties for which Hollywood is famous, and thus Rao Leeds was at last pushed aside into mental limbo.

That is about what one would expect from a man of Grant Melson's type. Not naturally romantic nor sentimental, to him it would seem a matter of soft-headedness to become enslaved by a woman. To be enslaved by work—that was one thing, and commendable; to find a woman

prowling through one's mind and, yes, stimulating one's imagination,—well, that was something else again. A woman was—just that, a woman; to be dated, to be kissed, to amuse one. The laws of decency to be observed, of course, since one was a gentleman. And that was that. Quite. Serious emotion for a woman? Unthinkable!

It was probably sixty days before Grant was to see Rao Leeds again. She arrived, by appointment, and stepped into his studio with a strange expression in her dusky eyes.

"Please," she said. She caught his forearm with flower-smooth fingers, and clung. "I feel so queer—so sick!" Before he could catch her she had crumpled into a faint at his feet.

To lift her was like picking up a half-grown child. He carried her into his den and deposited her, waxen beneath her rouge, on his couch. Whiskey from his cabinet, which he forced between her teeth, and the cold-water packs he laid against her wrists and forehead, soon brought gasps from her. When she opened those great dark eyes and the glazed and vacant look faded from them, Grant asked brusquely:

"Is this the result of starving down to camera proportions,—or haven't you the price to eat?"

Her lips trembled. For moments she made no effort to speak. Then she said faintly: "Who wants to know?" closed her eyes again and lay motionless.

Nonplussed, embarrassed, Grant sat looking at her. He reached for his handkerchief and his gesture, as he flipped it out of its neat square into a flag of snowy whiteness, was one of agitation. For tears had squeezed through the girl's closed lids and were rolling in slow glistening course down her cheeks.

"Here, use this," he said, speaking gruffly. He thrust the handkerchief

into her hand and glanced about, unhappy-eyed, as if seeking escape.

The girl sat up slowly, wiped her eyes, blew her nose, and sighed; across her wan face had come a resolute smile.

"This seems to be the end of lesson one," she said. "I'll go now." She rose on faltering feet.

"I think," he was standing beside her, steadying hand at her elbow, "I think you'd better rest here," his voice was gentler now, "while I go out and coddle you an egg and heat you some milk."

"Go out—where?"

"I've a kitchenette in the rear of the studio here."

"Oh." She sank back on the couch with a shaky sigh, against the cushions which he arranged expertly for her. "It's putting you to a lot of trouble," she objected, still speaking in that weak little undertone, "but I suppose food put into the stomach once in a while comes under the heading of necessities." Humor pushed through the shadow in her eyes and sparkled briefly.

"Quite." He turned away and started kitchenward. "I won't be long," he assured her.

He wasn't, but when he returned, tray in hand, he found Rao sleeping the sleep of one exhausted, one slim arm flung out childishly and softly relaxed. Sleeping so, she could have passed for fifteen. Grant set down the tray, picked up an afghan and spread it over her. He was in the act of arranging it there where her arm was thrust out, when she stirred.

"No,—don't!" she muttered, in the thick fashion of those who speak while sleeping. A scowl appeared between her brows. Her breathing accelerated. "Don't!" And then with an agony in her voice such as Grant had never heard before: "Oh—you terrible—you terrible—!" Her eyes

open now, stared at Grant unseeingly. She jerked herself up into a sitting posture, shaking, crouched, drawing back from him and against the wall in a very panic of fear, eyes still staring. "No, don't!" she chattered.

Grant dropped a hand to her shoulder, shook her gently.

"You're having a bad dream, Miss Leeds," he said. "Come, come; wake up!" He seated himself alongside of her. "That's it." For she had stopped trembling and intelligence came back into her eyes. "There's nothing to be afraid of, my dear."

"Oh, if only there weren't!" she whispered and collapsed against his breast in a violent fit of sobbing.

Gently, protectively, as if she were a frightened child, his arms went about her.

It is said that pity is akin to love. Grant Melson, having held Rao Leeds in pitying arms, fell victim again to the unforgettability of her. It was inevitable that he should come to hold her in arms of passion. He'd known many lovely women, had had his share of passion, but until Rao came he'd gone serenely on his way unattached. With Rao—this little mystery who could be flame, who could be ice, who could be putty, who could be steel—he reached the topmost tip of emotional experience. Bewildered, happy and unhappy by turns, he succumbed at last to the spell of her fascination for him. Friends shrugged, grinned and said:

"She had what it took, that's all."

And Rao? Her dusky eyes glowed smilingly when he called her "beloved," his special name for her. With the fairylike proportions of her young person perched on his knee, her hands like fragrant blossoms against his cheeks, she would bring her lips up to his mouth and then slide them away.

"That's a butterfly kiss," she'd bub-

ble out. And if he caught her to him to satisfy the burning hunger he felt for her, she might return his kisses exultantly, or she might push him away with a brilliant little:

"Don't, Grant! Don't always maul me the moment I come near you!"

He adored her—adored everything about her; the turn of her head,—the depth of her voice,—the way she lengthened her a's in speaking, and ignored her r's and drawled her vowels. And that name he had for her—"beloved"—how he said it! It was as if the love of all the ages rushed over his heart.

He bought her beautiful clothes to take the place of the meagre wardrobe she brought in the baggage he had moved from her cheap little apartment to his luxurious studio. She did not wish to be married, apparently. When he pressed her for her reasons, her reply was invariably flippant. Perhaps she'd wail out a comic: "A little girl like me? Why, Grant, they'd send me home and put me to bed without any supper if I so much as poked my nose inside of one of those marriage-license bureaus." Or: "I haven't time today, darling, but I appreciate the invitation. Ask me again sometime, won't you?" Not once did she show sign of taking the marriage topic seriously.

So Grant dismissed the subject from his thoughts. To have her, on any terms she might dictate, was enough. His eyes followed her adoringly as with easy grace and with her own indescribable little-girl dignity, she moved about in the charming quarters they occupied. Although it would have meant much to him to have had her entirely to himself, he nevertheless went diligently to work to correct in her diction the flaws he loved, but which were the chief reason, he was convinced, why she was kept back at the studios from the suc-

cess on which she had set her heart.

Of course they quarreled. The possessiveness, the jealousy, of Grant irked Rao. And quarreling on Grant's part was a storm of hurricane proportions. On Rao's part it was a white-faced sullenness, with provocative mouth drawling maddening monosyllables. Ultimately it was Rao who terminated each fuss by walking indifferently away on those small dancer's feet of hers, and usually she went to the piano on such occasions and began a monotonous practise-period of voice placement. At this she might work for hours, ignoring the fact that Grant was there, ignoring their quarrel. Indeed, so engrossed could she become in her exercises that it is doubtful if she was aware, at such times, of anything except her determination to master that which she had set out to do. And Grant—leaving pupils in another part of the studio, perhaps, to peep surreptitiously in on her—would come away with a sick feeling of defeat at his heart. At last, unable to endure the suffering of the thing, he would go to her and the torment faded from his eyes only when he held her again, close to his heart.

"Don't pay any attention to the things I say when I'm so crazy," he would plead with her. "I'm not responsible when you drive me so mad. And you could change it all, beloved, if you would. Please confide in me: Why are you so remote at times? What is it you fear? What am I to think when you come home to me, after a day at the studios, so strange, so different?"

"I tell you I'm tired—and that's the truth. I'm tired!" was always her defense. Her eyes would be afire with earnestness; more, resentment. "Won't you ever get through imagining things, just because I did a lot of silly talking that night I came here."

Yet Grant was convinced Rao was withholding something from him which he, as her best friend, her lover, should know. That she had been out of work and fainted from actual weakness brought on by the lack of food that night, she had confessed to him when she reached the proper mood. But what it was she feared and which made her look like a hunted thing at times, he could not learn from her. From others he did not try to learn; pride forbade that.

At last it came, the separation. Rao's "break" had come. She had been signed for a lead opposite one of Hollywood's most popular young male stars. It was a much coveted rôle. Grant rejoiced with her. He sat in the studio the day the picture got under way, talking with her when camera angles were being lined up, proud of the intelligent picture-sense she revealed in her conferences with her director on the set, proud most of all of her fresh young beauty there under the brilliant lights, where cameras and microphones did their recording.

But the young star of the picture was a man of unusual charm and an actor who had the reputation of falling in love with each of his leading women in turn, and Milt Crowper (of the drooping eyelid) was present during some of the takes. Crowper said to one of the actresses in the cast:

"Tell Rao not to forget what I said. . . . No, no, I don't care to talk to her; I'll stay where I am. But you tell her that for me, baby," and Grant, overhearing, wondered.

"What did Crowper mean?" he asked Rao late that evening. The thing had been bothering him all day as had some of the love scenes between Rao and the young male star.

"Who wants to know?" Her face had gone white. Into her eyes had come that strange look again.

"I want to know!" Worry, rising temper, made the words harsh. "I want to know right now!"

But he didn't find out. He said a good many things he regretted afterward. Rao said almost nothing at all. Chiefly, she looked at him out of eyes that had gone passive and which showed no interest even when, worked up to an insane pitch, he said bitterly:

"All right, all right! I'm through with you,—through, I tell you! I've been bound in torment by the shackles of my love for you, but I'm ripping those shackles off now,—do you hear me? Ripping 'em off!"

Of course she left. Grant made no effort to stop her. Merely sat throughout the night in his chair, as one stunned, almost insensible, afterward.

"What do you want to go on sitting around, sunk in the doldrums, for!" one of Grant's friends remonstrated with him one day. "You're not the first man to get the well-known *congé* from his best girl. Snap out of it, man! Rao sure has. I see her around everywhere, raising the dickens."

"With Mr. Butterfly, I suppose?" Grant said bitterly. He ground his cigarette into the tray at his elbow and it was a savage gesture. He sprang up to pace the room.

"Oh, now, Grant, dammit, he's a nice kid even if he does seem to get a crush on his leading ladies, one after another. No foolin', Ingram's a nice kid. Pretty much of a pup yet, mebbe, but growin' up. Good kid."

"Oh, yeh?" Grant paused in his stride and regarded the other sardonically.

"Now, now, keep your shirt on, sweetheart! Listen: Ingram did a lot for Rao in their picture (he's a good *hombre*), helped put her across. He never made a move to high hat her.

He'd walk the streets between the stages with her and help her with her lines,—all that sort of thing. I call it decent of him, dammit! Yuh wanna remember this is Hollywood, than which nothing is whicher among this star gang. It's usually dog eat dog,—a matter of stealin' and hoggin' on each other. Yuh don't need me t'tell yuh that. I tell yuh, the kid's all to the good; an' between 'em, Rao an' him—an', naturally, a few others had something to do with it—they made a good picture. Seen it?"

Grant nodded moodily. He did not add that he had seen it at least once each day in the three weeks since its release, thus satisfying his hunger for the sight of the girl he could not forget—the girl whom he had glimpsed in person but once since she'd left him. That had been the night before, as he stood on the sidelines, idly watching the crowds gathered to see the stars arrive for the Hollywood *première* of Greta Garbo in "Mata Hari." The sight of Rao, radiantly beautiful in velvet and ermine, arriving with Ingram Chance, had been more than Grant could endure. Brusquely, he thrust his ticket into the hands of a shabby young woman and, turning, fled from the scene.

"Well, then, you know it's a good picture. Of course, Rao'll never set the world afire, but while she's so young an' good-lookin' she'll get by; 'specially after the start she's got now. It was a real break for her to be cast with young Chance; no kid-din'."

"All right, all right!"

"Oh, come on an' snap out of it, yuh poor sap. Yuh act like you've gone nerts er something! C'mon, climb into your dinner togs; we're goin' places."

In the end, Grant was persuaded to go. They drove along in silence for a time out beyond Hollywood proper,

in the canyons. They returned at somewhat before midnight for a late snack at the popular hotel whose food and entertainment had captured the fancy of Hollywood's stars.

Music, glitter, lovely gowns, lovely faces. Grant relaxed in his chair and regarded it all sombrely. It was some time before he saw Rao in the dense crowd. Seeing her, he could scarcely drag his glance away again.

How beautiful she was in her gown of lustrous white satin, its bodice cut away to the waistline at the back! The way she sat nodding and half-smiling up at Ingram Chance, when Grant first saw her, made him think of some lovely blossom nodding gently on its stem.

It was, perhaps, twenty minutes after Grant's arrival (his companion was dancing, as he had been almost continually from the moment they came in) when Rao and Chance returned suddenly to their table after a brief turn about the floor. Grant saw at once that something was amiss with Rao.

Knowing her mannerisms so well, he knew—although he could not see the expression of her eyes from where he sat—that they would be wide with fright. Chance seemed to be questioning her. But of this she apparently was unaware, for she did not so much as look at him, but cast swift glances over her shoulder toward the dance floor they had abandoned.

Sudden, overpowering instinct jerked Grant to his feet. In a second he was heading for Rao, driven by he knew not what. Between the tables he made his way hurriedly, his glance on her face as he advanced, except when somebody moved into the way and momentarily cut off his view.

He was panting as he neared the table. She did not see him. With her lovely lips parted, she stared at

a man who now appeared suddenly there in the midst of the dancers on the edge of the floor. He was making his way rapidly toward her. The man was Milt Crowper.

"Ah!" Grant snarled the syllable out furiously, understandingly, and lunged forward. The football training of his college days helped him now—helped him to tackle that man Crowper and topple him just as the Crowper hand shot forth from side coat-pocket with a vial between its clenched fingers. This, as Chance snatched the screaming Rao into his arms and the great room went into uproar. . . .

The newspapers called it a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde case.

"But I never loved Milt Crowper, nor he me," said Rao, in the calm after hysteria from nerve shock had died down. "He was my guardian. When I was small and he could dominate me, it wasn't so bad. I danced, I worked in the picture, while he collected my salary. When the speakies came in, Milt became a coach. He wanted to train me, but I'd had enough of him. He was furious; he refused me money enough for food when I couldn't get work—refused me my own money that I'd earned. All along he'd threatened he'd do this—throw acid sometime. I lived in constant terror of him. I expected him to bob up from anywhere. So that going to and from work along the streets was torment to me. I knew him, you see; I knew he'd do it sometime."

Brief pause. Then:

"And to think that some of it should have burned your dear hands." Her voice, the very essence of tenderness, drawled the words weakly: "My poor boy,—so sweet to me, so forgiving. They're never going to be able to say we're not a part of each other,

with your skin grafted there on my shoulder, are they, dear?"

Pause again. Faint murmurs.

"I wonder who the man was, Ingram, who caught Milt and threw him."

"I can't be sure, precious, I was so excited and it all happened so fast, and then I had to carry you out. But it looked to me like Melson. He was pretty fond of you once, wasn't he?"

Very low, Rao said: "He belongs to the days you've forgiven, boy. But (you don't mind me saying it, do you, dear?) he meant a lot to me for a long time. And he thought he loved me too. But love can't be crushed, can it?—any more than one can crush a rose, if he wants it to survive. Oh, boy, please always be gentle with me. Violent words kill something inside me. Violence and distrust was all I had from Milt through terrible years."

"I will be gentle—always. I promise, sweet," earnestly.

"I'm so happy now." It was a sigh. "It's so marvelous, being really married and starting right this way—with you. It's so marvelous, it makes me love everybody in the world,—even Milt in his suicide's grave. And, of course, Grant; poor, crabby old dear."

But now the "poor, crabby old dear," who had been sitting on a chair just within that hospital room, await-

ing his turn to visit at the bedside back of that unrevealing screen of white fabric whence had come the voices of the lovers, rose. He rose and slipped soundlessly out through the still half-open door, the door through which he had been gestured by a wave of a floor nurse's hand, some five minutes previous.

Grant rose and slipped soundlessly out into the long hall into an elevator, down another hall and out into the street. Fragrance of palms, pepper-trees, and eucalyptus, intermingled; climbing roses against lattice there on the parking strip, blooms nodding gently in the soft breeze. . . .

A thorn from a climber caught in his sleeve. He halted, looked down. Empty-eyed, patient, he loosed the fabric of his sleeve and continued to stand then, unmindful of the glances of those who passed, unaware of the bright California sun, shining down. There was the tap, tap, tapping of something against his arm. A rosebud, that; a rosebud swung by the breeze. Tap—tap—tap!

The man's gaze wandered to the bloom and focussed there. With slow motion, as if his hands and brain were but clumsily coördinated, he cupped the bud between his palms. Tenderly, he stooped and pressed his lips against it.



EASY MONEY

By Fifi Irwin

NEIL PETERS found Austin Benson in the smoking-room of the Union League Club.

Austin had just lost heavily at poker, and was feeling none too affable when Peters approached him.

"I want to talk to you, young man," said Peters, pulling up a chair.

"Yeah?" Austin looked at him curiously through half-closed eyes. The next minute he drew out his cigarette case, and courteously offered him a smoke, but the older man waved it aside with a gesture of disapproval. His face was stern, serious.

"I'm not here for a friendly interview," he exploded with vehemence. "I'm going to tell you what I think of you. You're a worthless scamp! You've ruined my son Cyril!"

Austin shot up with a jerk. "What in the devil are you talking about?"

"You're the one who introduced him to that vile chorus girl he's keeping in a downtown apartment. Now he's suddenly gone crazy. He wants to marry her."

"You don't say?" Austin's lips curled into a half-smile. He remembered the occasion. A jolly little party after the show. Cyril had completely lost his head. "Well, these chorus girls have a way with them," he remarked presumptuously. "She's a pretty nifty little number."

Neil Peters reddened to the roots of his white hair.

"I won't have her in my family," he thundered. "I know what's she's after. It's my money!"

"You may be wrong," suggested Austin calmly. "It's barely possible that she's in love with Cyril."

"You're crazy. I know her kind. She's like all the rest. She's playing Cyril for what she can get out of him. Now look here, Austin; I want you to tell me where I can find her. I'll pay her off; I'll get rid of her."

"Oh, so you expect me to divulge Cyril's hiding place! Say, what do you think I am? Why, Cyril's a friend of mine."

"You got him into this mess. If you want to show your friendship, here's your chance to help him."

Austin sat silently meditating for a moment, his foot digging into the heavy pile of a Chinese rug. He wanted to laugh. So Peters was actually willing to buy off Cyril's girl friend?—miserly old Peters, who, everybody thought, loved his money more than anything else in the world. At length he said: "I don't know, Mr. Peters; I don't like to interfere with Cyril's romance. If he's in love with her, you know, it's going to hit him hard."

"What does that young idiot know about love?" sputtered Mr. Peters. "At his age I was in and out of it a dozen times, but I never made a damn fool of myself as he wants to do. Besides, if he married her I'd cut him off without a dollar. Let them try living on nothing a week, and see how long this love business will last."

"Did you tell him that?" Austin asked curiously.

"I certainly did. He threatened to marry her anyway; said she'd marry him if he hadn't a nickel. Don't you see, I've got to save that kid; I can't let him throw his life away."

"Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Peters; it wouldn't be fair. Cyril's a pal of mine; I couldn't play a rotten trick like that on him."

"Haven't you got any sense?" stormed Peters. "Can't you see you'd be doing the boy a favor?"

"But he'd never speak to me again."

Peters suddenly pulled out his check-book.

"I happen to know that you're usually in debt. Now, don't be a fool; how much is it worth to you?"

Austin looked up sharply. This was quite beyond his expectations. What a chance! The old boy was certainly loosening up. He reflected that he had lost plenty that evening. It was a big temptation. . .

Ten minutes later, Neil Peters was walking briskly down the stone steps of the Union League Club with the address of Julie Dean tucked securely in his vest pocket. His angular features held a look of determination. He got into his car and swung the door shut with a decisive bang. . .

The next morning at eleven, Julie Dean—young, slender, with dark bobbed curls framing a pretty oval face, and eyes that were brown and shadowy,—opened the door of her apartment to a gray-haired, distinguished-looking man of middle age.

"I am Mr. Peters, Cyril's father," said the man, stepping inside with an obvious air of assertion.

He looked about. It was the kind of an apartment he expected to find. Overstuffed chairs, the floors strewn with soft velvety rugs, bridge-lamps with gay futuristic shades, pictures of stage people in gilt frames. The place reeked with incense. Peters hated it. It made him think of a Chi-

nese joss-house. Julie threw him her sweetest smile, and offered him a chair.

"It's very nice of you to come to see me, Mr. Peters," she said demurely, seating herself next to him.

He cleared his throat. "This is not a social call," he informed her briefly. "I'll come straight to the point: I don't like this affair between you and my son. I want you to give him up."

"Why, Mr. Peters!" said Julie, in a surprised voice. "I don't think I understand."

"Well, I'll make myself clearer. This thing has to end. Cyril's paying for this apartment—keeping you here."

Her eyebrows lifted resentfully:

"You have no right to say things like that."

He cut in shortly, scornfully:

"I suppose you pay for this place out of what you make in the chorus."

Julie rose, tossed her bobbed curls.

"Mr. Peters," she announced defiantly, "there is such a thing as love."

Peters leaned a little forward. His tone was calmer.

"All right; prove that you care for him," he challenged. "Stop ruining his life; give him up. You won't lose anything; I'm willing to pay you well for it."

"You think you can buy me,—is that what you think?" exclaimed Julie, her body shaking.

"Now, look here, Miss Dean; you won't gain anything by that attitude. If Cyril marries you I'll cut him off without a dollar."

"He can work," defied Julie.

Peters grinned mirthlessly. "I wouldn't bank on that. He doesn't know what the word means."

Her hands fluttered up with a little frustrated gesture, but presently her face cleared and she sat down next to him again.

"Why don't you like me, Mr. Peters?" she asked looking earnestly into his eyes.

He moved a bit closer. This was better. The atmosphere seemed suddenly lighter. It was like the sun breaking through after a cataclysm of storm. Intuitively, he felt that he had gained a point. He'd better handle her with care. Everything depended on his adroitness.

"I have nothing against you," he said, in a more amicable tone. "In fact, I think you are a very attractive girl, and I believe you want to do the right thing. You wouldn't want to spoil my son's life, now, would you?"

Her eyes dropped to the floor, her long shadowy lashes fanned her cheeks.

"No-o!" she murmured, in a little tremulous voice.

He patted her hand. "I knew it. Well, I tell you what: You go away somewhere; take a nice trip,—Florida, California—anywhere. The treat will be on me. We'll make it—say, five thousand dollars. How does that suit you?"

"Cyril will hate me for it," she declared unsteadily.

"He'll love you for it, when he's old enough to have some sense," said his father.

Julie sighed, but looked resigned, and Mr. Peters produced his check-book.

Later, he walked out of the apartment building with a feeling of triumphant exultation. He was glad she had decided on Florida. It would put her at a good, safe distance. It had cost him plenty, but it was worth it. With Julie out of the way, maybe he could persuade Cyril to think seriously of a career. He had a nice place for him at the office.

Cyril returned home at an unusually early hour that evening. Neil Peters was reading in the library.

Over the tops of his glasses he observed Cyril standing uncertainly at the door, his hands in his pockets, a look of utter dejection on his boyish face.

"Hello, son; come on in!" he said brightly.

Cyril walked in slowly. He flung himself into a big chair and buried his face in his hands. After a long minute he drew himself up and looked at his father.

"I guess you were right, Dad," he said sadly, his tone manifesting the first bitter disillusionment of youth. "She was after my money all right, the little hussy. When I told her I'd have to work for a living, that you'd cut off my allowance if we married, she decided she didn't love me enough to risk it."

Neil Peters chuckled inwardly.

"Well, I wouldn't worry about it if I were you," he said consolingly. "There are plenty of nice girls in the world, and some day the right one will come along. However, while you're waiting, suppose you show up at the office and I'll fix you up with a good job. It's about time you settled down to something serious."

Cyril started forlornly across the room, but agreed.

In the meanwhile, Julie Dean was packing. Orchid and pink lingerie, gay little dancing slippers, chiffon silk hosiery, clever new sport and formal frocks, were scattered carelessly over chairs or peeped out from the corners of a smart steamer trunk. Florida loomed in the offing. She was thrilled beyond words.

The sound of the bell cut short the trend of her romancing. She sprang to her bedroom for a dash of powder, her wide silk pyjamas swaying jauntily about her shapely limbs, her little high heels clicking over the polished floor. In another minute she was back, answering the ring.

"Hello, Austin!" she sang out merrily. "Thought you'd never get here. I'm nearly packed."

Austin Benson, suitcase in hand, stepped into the apartment and kissed the pursed lips of the girl before him.

"Gee, baby," he said, "I'm sure proud of you. You showed your stage training this time; you put it over great."

"But, Austin, it was your idea. How did you ever think of it?"

"Well, I couldn't doublecross a pal, you know; that wouldn't be fair. Anyway, the old man had nothing to worry about. I was dead sure that Cyril's little gold-digging sweetie would give him the air if he ever became separated from the family fortune."

"And you let Mr. Peters believe that I was Cyril's girl! Oh, Austin, what an old fraud you are!"

He grinned and held her close. "Well, I figured that if old Peters was in the mood to give away some of his dough, we might as well have it. It isn't often he gets that way. That's why I phoned you to give him a show for his money."

Julie laughed—a gay little tinkling laugh:

"Just think,—five thousand dollars! Isn't it wonderful? And I've always wanted to go to Florida."

"Honeymooning?" he asked, tilting her chin.

"Anyway—with you," she whispered, burying her head in his woolly overcoat.



ABSOLUTELY BANAL

By Jay Fitzgerald

Enchanted I, who have been thus before,
Swear furiously by any wandering god;
Now, he is but a piece of clay, a clod—
Now he is but a man, no less, no more;

And I'll not lie awake for any such
And wet my pillow's white with silly tears;
And I'll not shake with sudden hopes and fears,
And I'll not think about him very much. . . .

And I'll not worry if he doesn't write,
And I'll not care because he's gone away;
And I'll not want him every single night,
And I'll not— Lord, the silly things I say!

INSIDE INFORMATION

By Gusta B. Weaver

WITH a sigh of comfort and content, big Bob settled his heavy body deeper into the capacious depth of the overstuffed chair, heaving the tiny figure seated in his lap like a pillow as he moved.

"Honey, are we goin' places, tonight?" the tiny figure asked.

"Yeah, sure—goin' to stay right in this little place tonight. I'm tired," he answered.

"Aw, come on, Bob, take me out this evening. I've been in all day." Jaree cuddled closer in the big arms cradling her, and cast warm, soft glances up into big Bob's amused eyes above her.

Bob gave another shift to his body, drew a long, hard drag on his smouldering cigarette, expelling the blue smoke into the cozy room with the satisfaction of the contented male in his natural habitat.

"Aw, baby, let's stay in tonight," he said coaxingly. "I've had a hard day. We'll go out steppin' tomorrow night sure. And we'll do anything you want to do." He ran his big hands caressingly down the smooth length of the short satin coolie jacket wrapped closely around the cuddling Jaree.

"What you do today that makes you tired tonight?" asked Jaree, her questioning smile registering the interest women are supposed to feel in their man's occupation, and masking successfully the eternal feminine question, when a man comes home tired in the evening. That is, the question

when a man does the sort of work Bob did, for Bob was house detective in the swanky Belmont Arms Hotel, where swanky men and women met and played in off hours, safely chaperoned by the careful and expensive attentions of the major domo and his entire staff.

Bob's duties were to see that no disturbance marred the harmony of the Belmont seclusion. It was surprising how difficult it was to perform his duties; surprising how many situations arose in which he had to perform quick mental feats, and sometimes physical ones, to keep the wheels of the Belmont service running smoothly. Sometimes he told Jaree about it in the evening.

"Had to think fast today, baby, nearly let 840 get into a jam."

"What happened?" Jaree asked the expected question drowsily.

"Remember Brazelton in 840 that I've told you about before?" he said, pushing the fire out of the nearly consumed cigarette on the tray beside him.

"The man who lives there, but doesn't have any girl friends in to visit him?" Jaree asked, her eyes opening wide, then closing tight as she settled deeper in his arms.

"Yeah, that's the one. I've told you how he's been livin' there for a couple of months, an' never gives the boys anything to do. Comes an' goes alone and never gives the lobby chorines the smallest tumble.

"Well, today, he starts givin' the

boys some work. Ginger ale and all the fixin's, an' in a few minutes in breezes the choicest bit of girl we've seen around the Arms in weeks. She had it, no foolin', Jaree. Well, the downstairs gang gave her the double O as she crossed to the elevator, and up she shoots to 840, and a 'Do Not Disturb' goes up outside the door.

"We was all chucklin' because this morning we'd been tipped off by a bell-hop at the Allerton that this exclusive boy has an apartment there, too, an' entertains some veiled dame in his place there nearly every afternoon. He don't tip nothin' at the Allerton but paper, so we kinda figures, you know, that he's decided to bring her on home, so to speak, and think we're in on the velvet in the future.

"Everything goes smooth for a couple of hours, then wham! In walks one of them roly-poly papas, the kind that can get 'em with the dough, but hasn't the old S. A. to keep 'em. He looks the desk over, then calls for me and says right off the bat:

" 'I want to get into number 840.'

"That gives me a start, but I thinks fast and tells him that 840 is out. But he's already looked over the key register and sees that, so far as the hotel is concerned, 840 is *in*, so he gives me the nasty look n' says.

" 'I'm going in that room, so make it snappy.'

"I get his meanin' and sizes him up as one of the certificate and preacher tripe, so I stops thinkin' about how I can get him out and commences to think fast of how can I get rid of the classy flame in 840, an' all this time we're walkin' toward the elevator. I know it ain't no use to pull that old one about 'let me call and see if he's in', because this boy had the dope, else he wouldn't be bossin' me like he is.

"We passes the bell captain and I

raise my voice, givin' him a quick, hard double O and says: 'Well, Mister, I know Mr. Brazelton is out, but if you have to see the inside of 840, it's okay by me.'

"The cap takes the tumble and works fast on the phone, while I'm workin' slow on the elevator, so when I open the door of 840 the room's as empty as a last year's bird-nest."

"Where did they go?" Jaree asked sleepily.

"Huh? Oh, I don't know, didn't bother to go into that. The captain took care of them. I was too glad to get old Fuzzy Wuzzy off my hands. She got out all right, though, and I'll bet it costs the old boy plenty to make up for such naughty, bad suspicions of that nize baby."

"Un, huh, I expect so," agreed Jaree, stretching the slim length of her body on big Bob's lap. "Well, if we're not going out I think I'll go to bed." She jumped lightly from Bob's knees and after a quick kiss on his plump cheek, walked lazily into the softly lighted bedroom.

Bob watched her swaying body with a grin of pride, took a deep breath of utter satisfaction and content and reached for a fresh cigarette. Nothin' like havin' a cozy little nest like this to come home to, he mused watching the smoke curl around the rosy floor-lamp. A night at home, after the atmosphere of the Belmont, and a girl he knew he could handle! Just keep 'em interested, an' give 'em what they want when they want it and they won't go running around for excitement, was his theory. Two years of married life unmarred by even a tiny quarrel had proven him right. He chuckled as he recalled the look on the old man's face when he found 840 empty. Not so bad bein' a wise guy on the inside. Couldn't put anything over on Bob. No sir, he knew all the angles.

"Be there in a minute, baby," he laughed, as he heard Jaree's drowsy request from the darkened bedroom. Softly he pulled out the light. . . .

The next afternoon Bert Brazelton paced the floor of the small exquisitely furnished apartment at the Al-lerton. He looked impatiently at the expensive watch on his wrist, an expression of displeasure on his handsome face. What could be keeping his afternoon playmate? She was late.

The bell rang sharply and he went hurriedly to the door, flinging it wide with a gesture, his arms open to receive his veiled visitor. But he dropped them in a hurry as his eyes

met those of the uniformed houseboy holding a telegram toward him. He handed the boy a bill, closed the door quickly and tore the telegram from the envelope. Slowly he read the message, then rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Well, I'll be damned," he muttered as he walked to the table, laying the telegram before him, as he reached for a cigar and lit it. The telegram read:

"Might as well close up. I won't be back ever. Know all about yesterday afternoon. You can't double-cross me and get by with it.

"Jaree."



A TWILIGHT TRYST

By Minna Irving

When the silvery veil of the twilight covers
 The drowsy world it's the hour for lovers;
 Like you and me, who have felt the thrill
 Of a tender touch, or a lingering kiss
 That sets the blood in a flame until
 The senses swim in a sea of bliss;
 And all the passion and all the pain
 Of all the lovers under the sun
 Roll like a river through us twain,
 Melting our two souls into one.
 Give me kisses of fire and dew,
 Lulled on your bosom I would be,
 For king of my heart and life are you,
 And lord of the body and soul of me! . . .
 But how many lips have you kissed I wonder,
 And how many hearts have you torn asunder?

CRISIS

By Vera Kackley

A TRUCK careened out of a dark alleyway, a frenzied "Look where you're going!" a scream, a figure caught beneath the wheels. Then a burden, almost lifeless, carried into the hospital.

"She hasn't much chance," the house doctor shook his head. "Weak heart. Likely to go back on her now." He laid an ampule of adrenaline on the table. "If it is necessary, give her this. There won't be much time to spare."

The doctor reached the door and then turned back to the nurse.

"And, Miss Henry, they've sent for her fiancé. He is out of town somewhere. If he comes, let him in, but no one else. They were to have been married tomorrow."

The door swung softly behind him.

"Been married tomorrow," the words beat dully against Ruth Henry's brain. "Been married tomorrow."

There was a time when she, too, was to have "been married tomorrow." The only man she ever had loved—the love that comes only once in a starved woman's life.

She had lived with him, hopefully and joyously, for three years, because she had wanted to . . . Together they had sought the apartment and found it. She could shut her eyes and see it yet—the small kitchen gleaming in green and white, the bedroom with its rose coverlet and shades, the dining alcove where she had induced a box of nasturtiums to bloom.

She could shut her ears, too, and hear him come in—she always pretended that she hadn't. And the thrill of the unexpected presents he brought her, a vegetable cutter that cut potatoes five ways, new cushions for the davenport, and once he brought a fat Chinese god.

"To salute the pagan in you!" he had told her gravely, but his eyes—gray, friendly eyes that Ruth loved—smiled.

Then they decided to be married. They talked it over and thought it would be the best. The night before it was to happen, they went out to celebrate. They had dinner downtown, and a bottle of red wine shared between them.

"To my wife!" he had toasted her.

"To tomorrow!" she had said, and her lips had quivered a little.

The next day, though, he had been strange and distracted. He went to work and then came back.

"Ruth, I've got to tell you. I can't go on with it."

"Can't go on with what?" . . . But she knew.

"I can't go on with this. We can't get married." The words were grim.

"We can't get married?" The world rocked and she clutched at the wall for support.

"No, we can't," his eyes evaded hers. "There isn't anything wrong with you, Ruth; you're a good kid. Only you might as well know. Some girls you marry and some you don't——"

Ruth's eyes blazed. "All right," she

told him quietly, "all right. But you wait; I'll get even with you." And there was something near hate in her tone.

He packed his things and left Ruth to close the apartment.

Five years had gone—could they be five?—and in the busy city she never had seen him or heard of him again. She had taken training as a nurse, and had slipped if not naturally, at least conveniently into the new life. She had forgotten— Oh, well, she had almost forgotten. . . But still some day she would get even.

Now she sat beside the hospital bed of this other girl who was to have "been married tomorrow." . . . This girl had a break, she thought. All she had to do was to die. She didn't have to carry around a heart that had gone dead inside her and a desire to "get even" that burned her flesh like a red-hot coal.

Hours, quiet hours, slipped by, marked only by the labored breathing and an occasional moan from the girl on the bed. Once the house doctor came in. He counted the patient's pulse and shook his head.

"Has her sweetheart come?" he asked the nurse.

"Not yet."

"Well, he'd better hurry. She'll reach the crisis soon now," he said. "When it comes, you'll have to be quick." Again he indicated the adrenaline.

"I know, doctor," the nurse promised.

He went out.

Early morning gray streaked the window shades and touched the patient and the nurse, rigid and sleepless in the chair beside her. A step sounded on the threshold. Ruth start-

ed. A man stood there—a man, gaunt and unshaved, looking at her with tortured gray eyes.

"Oh, God," Ruth groaned, "not you!"

He nodded dully.

As if by signal the girl on the bed sighed and collapsed—the collapse Ruth had been looking for all night. The weakened heart that could pump blood only so long was stopping.

Ruth sprang for the drug. And then her hand was stayed. Why should she? . . . This was her chance, the chance she had waited for, the chance to get even. To hurt him as much as he hurt her.

The patient's color was fading fast. She was choking for breath, her pulse was fluttering. Scarcely knowing what she did, Ruth took her place at the side of the bed, expert fingers on the girl's wrist, counting the beats. The girl's chest heaved. Her throat rattled. Marble coldness spread over her face. Only a minute. A half a minute. The man's face was ashen.

"Can't you do something?" he begged. Sweat stood on his forehead.

Ruth could not speak. A half a minute. A third of a minute. An eternity. She reached for the drug. She pushed the needle into the white, yielding flesh. The girl's color came back, she breathed. . . .

The nurse adjusted a pillow in a matter-of-fact fashion behind the patient's head. Then she turned to the man.

"I could have gotten even with you by letting her die," she told him, "but I saved her. You loved her."

"I don't know what you are talking about," he stared back at her. "I never saw her before. I came here to find you."



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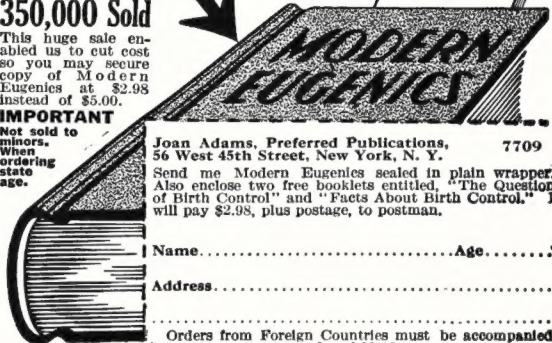
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